

THE COLLECTED PLAYS OF
W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

VOL. I

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THE COLLECTED PLAYS OF W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

—

LADY FREDERICK

MRS. DOT

JACK STRAW

PENELOPE

SMITH

THE LAND OF PROMISE

PREFACE

THE first three plays in this volume were written to be produced. At the beginning of the century, though the managers as now were complaining of the dearth of plays, it was even more difficult than at present for an unknown dramatist to get one accepted. Sir Arthur Pinero, Henry Arthur Jones and R. C. Carton held the stage, and for the rest the managers were content to depend on adaptations from the French or German. The only organisation that offered the untried author a chance was the Stage Society; and even this was more inclined to give performance to a foreign play that was supposed to be too advanced for the general public than encouragement to an English author. It was the Stage Society, however, that produced my first play. I knew no one connected with it. I was obscure. The committee took it on its merits. I shall always be grateful to it.

The play was called *A Man of Honour*. It was written in 1898 and produced in 1902. In the interval it had been refused by half a dozen managers. It was very well received, though its end, a little grim for the time, disconcerted the audience. The critics judged it according to their preconceptions. The more conventional abused it heartily; the earnest students of the drama praised it. *Et ego in Arcadia vixi*: I too have been a highbrow. I have not looked at it for more than forty years and I think it must have been somewhat ridiculous. I believe that two or three scenes were well enough written. The rehearsals taught me most of what I know of stage-craft. In the cast were four actors who later achieved eminence in their profession. These were Dennis Eadie, Granville Barker, O. B. Clarence and Nigel Playfair. Granville Barker wrote some very interesting plays and Nigel Playfair was made a knight. He played the smallest

of the four parts. There was in the first act of my play a little scene that sounded so well in rehearsal and went so well on performance that I was convinced that I could write a comedy. I could not help noticing that a play produced by the Stage Society did not lead to very much. After the two performances they gave it and the notices in the press it was as dead as mutton. I felt a trifle flat after the production of *A Man of Honour*. I looked reflectively at the Thames and was conscious that I had not set it on fire. I badly wanted to write plays that would be seen not only by a handful of people. I wanted money and I wanted fame. I did not know then that success on the stage can only bring notoriety. But it was not without misgiving that I turned to comedy. I knew that the drama could only regain its proper place in the literary life of the time and be of serious import to intelligent men if it dealt in a sincere spirit with life. In my day we meant by this prostitution. We were willing, it is true, to consider adultery if the consequences were harrowing; but we had no patience with the quality and were interested in the proletariat only if it was vicious or starving: it was the middle class with its smug respectability and shameful secrets that offered us our best chance to be grim, ironical, sordid and tragic. We were not gay, life was too grave for that; we were not light, our admiration for Ibsen had taught us to leave that to the French. We went the whole hog. Sometimes when I have been invited to a party in Chelsea and listened to the conversation of the cultured young I have wondered if it ever occurs to them that in our day we were just as silly as they.

Stifling then my honourable scruples I sat down and wrote a comedy which I called *Loaves and Fishes*. The chief character was the fashionable vicar of a London parish. It was refused by every manager to whom it was sent on the ground that the public would not care to see the cloth held up to ridicule. I found somewhat to my dismay that the small success I had had at the Stage Society had done me harm rather than good with the managers. They read my plays

with prejudice; after *A Man of Honour* they were pretty well convinced that I should never write anything that had a penny in it. They were not alone. Max Beerbohm, walking with me on the pleasant lawns of Merton Abbey, earnestly besought me to give up a hopeless endeavour. In his gracious, flattering way he told me that I had a mind too delicate, a sensitiveness too refined, ever to succeed in the vulgar scramble of the stage. He little knew. I was young, poor and determined. I reflected upon the qualities which the managers demanded in a play: evidently a comedy, for the public wished to laugh; with as much drama as it would carry, for the public liked a thrill; with a little sentiment, for the public liked to feel good; and a happy ending. I realised that I should have more chance to get a play accepted if I wrote a star part for an actress, for women are persuasive; and it seemed to me that if I could devise a part that an actress very much wanted to play it was probable that she would get a manager to let her. I asked myself what sort of part would be most likely to tempt a leading lady. Leading ladies are human. I asked myself what sort of woman the average woman would like to be. The answer was obvious: the adventuress with a heart of gold; titled, for the sex is peculiarly susceptible to the glamour of romance; the charming spendthrift and the wanton of impeccable virtue; the clever manager who twists all and sundry round her little finger and the kindly and applauded wit. Having made up my mind upon this the rest was easy. I wrote *Lady Frederick*. But it had in the third act a scene in which the heroine had to appear dishevelled, with no make-up on, and have her hair done while she arranged her face before the audience. No actress would look at it. One, when urged to play the part, stamped her pretty foot and said the suggestion was the greatest insult that she had ever had to put up with. Another said it was hardly the thing a lady would do. The play was eventually bought by an American manager and he asked me to write in some more epigrams. He said it wanted gingering up. I went away, and in two

hours wrote as well as I could twenty-four. I am glad that the fashion for them has gone out. It is easy to write an epigram (you have only to loop the loop on a commonplace and come down between the lines) but it is easier not to write one. The manager, however, could not induce any actress in England or America to risk showing her naked face to the public and the play eventually came back to me. I shall always be grateful to him, partly for the advance on royalties which he gave me and on which I lived for a year, but more because when I met him in Paris he gave me my first cocktail. He told me that one day I should be a distinguished dramatist and when, on leaving him, I walked up the boulevard I trod on air; but whether it was on account of his encouragement or because the cocktail had made me completely drunk I cannot after so long decide.

While *Lady Frederick* was being refused by manager after manager I wrote another play, and this time, profiting by experience, I decided that I would write nothing that anyone could possibly take objection to. I made use of the same principles that had served me in *Lady Frederick*, but I made my heroine even more virtuous; her reputation was unblemished and she did nothing that was not perfectly nice. I did everything I could to make my play innocuous. Sometimes as I wrote I had an uneasy feeling that I was overdoing it. I asked myself whether I was not riding the banal too hard. I finished the play and started it on its journey. This was *Mrs. Dot*. It was refused as uniformly as *Lady Frederick* had been. The managers praised the dialogue, but complained that there was not enough action, and one suggested that I should put in a burglary. I did not see my way to this.

I began to think that I should never be able to write a picce that a leading lady would like well enough to insist on playing and so made up my mind to try my hand at a man's play. I employed the same method merely changing the sex of my principle character, and wrote *Jack Straw*.

Then it happened that Otho Stuart, who had the Court Theatre where he was trying to produce plays of merit

without losing too much money, found himself at a loose end. He had been surprised by an unexpected failure and for some reason could not put on at once the piece he had in mind. *Lady Frederick* was brought to his notice, and though it was not the sort of thing he cared for, his proclivities being Shakespearean and his heart with the drama of ideas, he was in a quandary. He thought *Lady Frederick* would run the six weeks he needed to get his next play ready and so accepted it. It lasted for more than a year. *Jack Straw* was put on a little while later and *Mrs. Dot* shortly after that. But *Mrs. Dot* was the most successful of the three.

When I received news from my agent that *Lady Frederick* was going into rehearsal immediately I was at Girgenti. The letter arrived on Sunday and the first rehearsal was to take place on Thursday. I was excited. It was an occasion which I felt I must on no account miss. For the time I was not prepared to interest myself further in Greek temples. But I lived from hand to mouth and had only come to Sicily because I had sold a story for twenty pounds; the money was to arrive at Palermo just about the same time as I and on it I proposed to see the rest of Sicily and get home. I counted the money I had with me. It was only enough to take me to Naples. I could not wait for my twenty pounds; I packed my bag, jumped into the train and at Palermo just caught the packet to Naples. I arrived there on Monday morning. I went to Cook's and found that a ship was going to Marseilles that afternoon and took a ticket, but when I offered a cheque in payment the agent firmly refused to accept anything but cash. I assumed an air of outraged dignity, but it availed me nothing; I expostulated, I raged, I stormed; and at last (I am not a dramatist for nothing) flung out of the office vowing that I would not put up with such insolent treatment.³ I did not know a soul in Naples and I had about five shillings in my pocket. I went to the office of the steamship company and asked for a first class ticket to Marseilles (at Cook's I had asked for a second, perhaps that had been my mistake) and sat while the clerk made it out. When

it was ready I produced my cheque book with a good deal of flamboyance and without a word wrote a cheque for the amount due. The clerk, young and timid, looked a trifle doubtful, but my assurance was such that I think he had not the nerve to refuse my cheque; in a minute I was out of the office with my ticket to Marseilles in my pocket. But I had to get to London. I had noticed on my way in that the shipping agents were also bankers, the banking part of the establishment being in another part of the building; I went in and walked boldly up to the desk. I took out my cheque book and the ticket I had just received.

"I'm going to Marseilles on one of your boats this afternoon. You might cash me a cheque for a fiver, will you?" I smiled ingratiatingly, but with a certain condescension. "Here's my ticket in case you want a proof of my *bona fides*."

I began to write my cheque as though there was no possibility of a refusal. The cashier took it and looked at it.

"Do you know anyone here?" he asked me.

I forgot the name of the bank, but I think one of the partners was called Turner. It was the middle of summer, and very hot and near the luncheon hour. I thought I would take a chance. I smiled pleasantly at the cashier.

"Is Mr. Turner in?" I asked.

"No, he's away," said the cashier. "D'you know Mr. Turner?"

"Well," I said.

"Oh, then I suppose it's all right."

He cashed the cheque, but I could see that he was not very easy about it, and I did not linger in the bank long after I had the five sovereigns in my pocket. I was in great spirits, for now I had enough money to take me to Paris, and I felt confident that I could get on from there without delay. It was a charming journey; the sea was calm and the sky blue. I sat on deck reading. If everything went well I could get to London in the nick of time; it would be a nuisance if I was held up in Paris. Then two of my fellow passengers

came up to me and asked if I would like to come into the ships' sweep on the day's run.

"How much is it?" I asked.

"Half a crown."

I knew then how I was going to get from Paris to London. My heart leaped. I handed one of the men my half-crown, gave him my name and went on reading. In an hour he came back and paid me twenty-five shillings. When I got to London I still had a shilling for my cab. On Thursday morning at eleven o'clock I strolled into the Court Theatre. I felt like Phileas Fogg after his journey round the world in eighty days entering the Reform Club as the clock struck eight.

Since these plays introduced me to the stage I think it would be ungrateful to leave them out of this edition, but I am well aware of their defects and it would be absurd to write about them at length. Their success made the managers eager to take other plays, and the three that follow in this volume were written on commission to suit certain actors, *Penelope* for Marie Tempest, *Smith* for Miss Marie Lohr and Robert Loraine and *The Land of Promise* for Irene Vanbrugh. I think they show some slight advance in skill and perhaps *The Land of Promise* might still hold an audience. They established me as the most popular dramatist of the day. But not long after I had achieved this somewhat spectacular success an unfortunate incident befell me. I knew from long experience that the way of the literary man was hard; and when I was asked for interviews saw no harm in giving others opportunity to earn a few guineas at so little inconvenience to myself. But straightway, often in the very paper that had published the interview I found myself abused for self-advertisement, (though everyone knows that no amount of writing about it can save a play that does not please, whereas one that does needs no more advertising than the entertainment it gives to succeeding audiences), or censured for venturing on the strength of three or four trivial pieces to express my view on the subject, only to be treated

with reverence, of the British Drama. I thought it hardly fair that these gentlemen of the press should have it both ways: you are not obliged to ask a man to dinner, but if you do it seems ungracious to call him a parasite because he accepts. I made up my mind consequently to follow the course that was least trouble to myself—it is a very good rule for getting through life comfortably—and decline thenceforward the flattering importunities of the interviewer. But since I was adopting an attitude, a process that is forced upon everyone who has relations with the public, I preferred to give it a certain completeness: I determined not again to appear before the curtain on first nights, (a vulgar practice only to be excused by its antiquity,) and never to write letters to the newspapers.

But I took this resolution at an unlucky moment, for I had recently said that the object of a play was to entertain; and a dozen journalists, stating that by entertainment I meant amusement (though not explaining why I was such a fool as to use one word when I had another in mind,) attacked the platitude with fury. I could not help wishing that I had assumed my pose a week later so that I might have explained both what I said and what I meant—they were in point of fact the same thing, but I did not know then how dangerous it was to be so telescopic—but the experience was not entirely wasted. It was useful training for the vituperation that I was to suffer later. I cannot pretend that I was indifferent to it at the time, but I did not allow it to hinder me from following the course I had chosen, and now after forty years I can look back on it with good humour. I was rated like a schoolboy and abused like a pickpocket. I read that I had neither decorum nor decency and wondered whether the writer would have been so rashly libellous had he known that all my relations were lawyers. The editor of a weekly paper, not content with the two columns of invective contributed by his critic, allowed an anonymous correspondent to point out how lamentable was my 'case'; and I learned that a debating society in Kensington discussed my

fall from grace on a Sunday night. I wish I had been there to hear. The intelligentsia turned a cold shoulder on me and I wandered no more in the pleasant groves of Arcady. I was accused of flippancy in such terms as showed that my censors looked upon it as an unpardonable weakness. Many hard things were said of me because comedy was more lucrative than tragedy and I grew callous to hearing that I had sold my soul for money. I am not such a fool as to pretend that I am indifferent to the money I have made. Unlike some of my fellow-writers I had no other means of earning a living than my pen; I was not so fortunate as to marry a wife rich enough to support me, nor had I the luck to have a father whose industry supplied me both with an income and with material for my satire. Nothing is so degrading as a constant anxiety about means of livelihood, and I do not suppose that anyone can be other than heartily thankful when he sees himself relieved for the rest of his life from sordid cares. Money is like a sixth sense without which one cannot make a complete use of the other five. Without an adequate income half the possibilities of the world are cut off. The only thing to be careful of is that one does not pay more than twenty shillings for the pound one earns.

Except once or twice when circumstances compelled me to write when I was ill, I have always written with pleasure. Sometimes the result has pleased others and then my play has succeeded; sometimes it has not, and then my play has failed; but so far as I am concerned it has always succeeded, for my pleasure was independent of the result. Under a sedate exterior I enjoyed then high spirits, and I wrote, as the crickets chirrup, without the anguish of mind some writers confess to, because it was my nature to.

I was blamed also for my fertility, which is a merit, it appears, only in the dead, but when I look back I am astounded at my moderation. I had always half a dozen plays in my head, and when a theme presented itself to me it did so divided into scenes and acts, with each 'curtain' staring me in the face, so that I should have had no difficulty

in beginning a new play the day after I had finished the one I was engaged on. If I did not write six a year it is only because it would have bored me. I have always written with pains and care, but I am an improviser. Some writers beat out their matter little by little, they write and write again, they add something here and something there; they put their work together like the pieces of a mosaic; and I am prepared to believe that so they achieve sometimes an excellence that the improviser cannot hope for. With him it is hit or miss. I daresay the elaborator gets nearer perfection, but the improviser perhaps has a greater spontaneity and he preserves the freshness of any inspiration he may have. Anyhow he has not made himself, and he must make the best of what gifts he has. Fertility is one of his compensations. I have often tried writing scenes again, but have found that I wrote not better but merely different ones.

I think the difficulty of play-writing has been much exaggerated. Persons have been attracted to it by the financial rewards it offers, by the notoriety that attends success, and by the opportunities the theatre gives for appealing to large numbers of people. They have tried to write plays without possessing the dramatic instinct. And that is the only thing that is essential. It is just as much a gift as the sensitive palate of the wine-taster. It has nothing to do with intellect. You can write a very good play with the mental equipment of a bar-tender and with all the culture of a cabinet minister write a very bad one. I do not suppose anyone who writes plays knows exactly why his lines get over the footlights or what it is in his scenes that holds an audience. But plainly it is only because it is an instinct that it can touch the emotions, for reason can only speak with reason; and the appeal of the drama is to the emotions rather than to the intellect. Some dramatists, of course, have found it difficult to write plays because they were not men of letters and therefore could not without effort put down on paper their thoughts in the form of dialogue. I remember being shown the manuscript of a playwright of this sort and

my surprise at finding how often he had written such trifling sentences as: *will you have some tea*; or: *let us go for a walk*, before he was able to get them in these words. A novelist who spent so long on so little would starve. In my strenuous youth, in order to learn English, I spent part of each day in copying out certain classical writers whose style pleased me, reading a little and then trying to write it from memory; and in this way I went through some of Dryden's essays, much of the *Holy Dying* of Jeremy Taylor, and the whole of Swift's *A Tale of a Tub*. It was tedious, but it enabled me to express my thoughts, such as they were, with facility. I hasten to add that there is no particular reason why the dramatist should have a literary training, and besides the ease it gives him in writing, an acquaintance with literature is perhaps chiefly useful in helping him to avoid the literary. It is only a convention that delicacy of expression accompanies delicacy of sentiment. Now that few people read anything but newspapers the instinct is to use hackneyed terms and a pomposity of phrase which are intolerable on the stage. A natural effect can only be got by an artificial simplicity.

The aim of the drama is not to instruct but to please. Its object is delight. I cannot persuade myself that it need be taken with the seriousness that is cultivated in certain quarters. It would be a benefit if less attention were paid to it. I deplore the fuss that accompanies the production of a play, the paragraphing and the interviews; a play is no more difficult to write, and takes little more time, than a longish short story. I wish it could be written with no more sense of responsibility and treated as casually. It is unreasonable to expect masterpieces, a masterpiece is an accident, but it might be that thus there would be produced plays of sufficient merit to provide a tolerant audience with an evening's diversion. So were plays written in the golden age of Spanish drama and in England under Elizabeth and James I. Art is a mistress who takes more kindly to the lover who chucks her under the chin than to the lover who

kisses the hem of her garment. She is indifferent to morals; no excellence of motive will enable you to write a good play or paint a good picture. The desire to do the best that is in you, as the phrase goes, may result only in the exposure of a sad vacuum. A lofty purpose will not serve you so well as a competent technique. Art is merely a luxury. Men very naturally attach importance chiefly to self-preservation and the propagation of their species. They bestow honours upon those, soldiers and politicians, who enable them, they think (and often erroneously) to follow these instincts with safety; and it is only when these are satisfied that they consent to occupy themselves with the entertainment provided for them by writers, painters, and musicians. But it is difficult for those who are occupied with the arts to realise this: there is in them I know not what power that drives them to such complete absorption in their work as to make them subordinate life to it entirely. It is a constant struggle in which for the most part they remain dupes of the instinct that possesses them. They succumb to an influence they do not realise and life slips through their fingers unlived. But life is there to be lived rather than to be written about: the artist were wiser to look upon his writing as a graceful accomplishment that does not absorb, but rather adds pleasure to existence. And as for posterity, well, the dramatist at all events, can afford to snap his fingers at it. For he practises the most ephemeral of all the arts.

The day before yesterday's newspaper is not more dead than the play of twenty years ago. I suppose no form of art has a more vivid appeal than the drama, but it is just this vividness that makes it so impermanent. The foundation of living drama is actuality. It must be natural above all things and it achieves the illusion of truth by reproducing as exactly as the exigencies of the theatre permit the manners and customs of the day. The dramatist's characters resemble the persons of his period and he makes them talk (with the necessary transformation his medium demands) in the fashion of the moment. To gain verisimilitude he uses

familiar touches, and trivial detail that cause his audience to feel at home; the persons of his play are moved by the sentiments of their time; the problems that perplex them, the emotions that drive them, however universally human they may be, are coloured by their age. But the little things of life change. The cocktail takes the place of the cake and a glass of wine that were served to the visitor years ago; the motor car takes the place of the private hansom. And with these changes a play ceases to become lifelike and becomes quaint: the spectator no longer quite believes in it. New inventions alter dramatic technique and make old plays old fashioned: the telephone for example has made disclosures possible that before, for verisimilitude, called for the exercise of a cumbersome ingenuity. The moving picture has quickened the perceptions of the audience so that it will grasp in a couple of speeches what formerly needed a long scene to explain. The way of talking changes and if a reader is curious to see how quickly and how much, he may compare the dialogue of Henry Arthur Jones, a naturalistic playwright of the last generation, with that of Mr. Noel Coward. Types change. The Frenchified fop of Restoration Comedy is as dead as the heavy father of Victorian Drama. And where is the *mère noble*? Not so long ago the New Woman was a favourite character; she was invaluable to Ibsen and his followers, and the writers of comedy got many a good laugh out of her. But now every woman is a New Woman. Sentiments change too, and a change of manners has made the subjection of wives to their husbands and the respect of children for their parents bear a ludicrous air. But what is more surprising is that change affects even the emotions which one would have thought were so profoundly rooted in human nature that the reaction of an audience to a play that dealt with them would, notwithstanding all superficial changes, remain unaltered. It is not so. For instance we do not believe in jealousy any more. We no longer look upon a woman's chastity as her essential virtue. I submit to the dramatists of today that the un-

faithfulness of a wife is no longer a subject for drama, but only for comedy.

Of course I know that a great many plays have come down the ages and some of them are still acted from time to time. The greater number of these are poetic and have been preserved for the loveliness of their verse rather than for their dramatic value. I have seen *Romeo and Juliet* acted in French and could not persuade myself that it was anything more than a bustling and very improbable melodrama. As to plays in prose I cannot think of a single serious one that has held the stage; a few comedies have remained, but they are amusing only in the fashionable sense of the word as wax flowers in a glass case or tinsel pictures are 'amusing'. They are national monuments and are acted from a sense of duty or with an educational object; and sometimes the famous parts they contain tempt the ambition of a player. But their interest is archeological, one laughs at their humours with difficulty, from the outside and not as a participant in the play; and it is only in a scene here and there that life remains. They are part of literature, but only by courtesy part of the theatre. For wit too, which is the most delicate flower of civilisation, is ephemeral.

But play-writing is an agreeable pastime, and in an industrial community in which idleness is always rather difficult, it fills up very pleasantly many hours of the day that would otherwise be tedious. I often read (in a translation) that instructive page of Herodotus which narrates the adventure of Hoppokleides, son of Tisander. It will be remembered that Kleisthenes had a daughter named Agarista whom he resolved to give in marriage to the man whom he should find the most accomplished of all the Greeks. And his choice fell upon Hippokleides both on account of his manly qualities and because of his parentage. When the day appointed for the consummation of the marriage arrived Kleisthenes (like Hans Breitman) gave a party. And presently Hippokleides ordered the flute-player to play a dance; and when the flute-player obeyed, he began

to dance; "and he danced, probably, so as to please himself; but Kleisthenes, seeing it, beheld the whole matter with suspicion. Afterwards, Hippokleides, having rested awhile, ordered someone to bring in a table; and when the table came in, he first danced Laconian figures on it, and then Attic ones; and in the third place, having leant his head on the table he gesticulated with his legs. But Kleisthenes, when he danced the first and second time, revolted from the thought of having Hippokleides for a son-in-law, on account of his dancing and want of decorum, yet restrained himself, not wishing to burst out against him; but when he saw him gesticulating with his legs, he was no longer able to restrain himself, and said: 'Son of Tisander, you have danced away your marriage.' But Hippokleides answered: 'Hippokleides cares not.'"

The dramatist does well to bear this story in mind.

LADY FREDERICK

A COMEDY
in Three Acts

CHARACTERS

LADY FREDERICK BEROLLES
SIR GERALD O'MARA
MR. PARADINE FOULDES
MARCHIONESS OF MERESTON
MARQUESS OF MERESTON
ADMIRAL CARLISLE
ROSE
LADY FREDERICK'S DRESSMAKER
LADY FREDERICK'S FOOTMAN
LADY FREDERICK'S MAID
THOMPSON
A WAITER

TIME: 1890

LADY FREDERICK

THE FIRST ACT

SCENE: *Drawing-room of the Hotel de Paris at Monte Carlo. A large, sumptuously furnished room, with doors right and left, and windows at the back leading on to a terrace. Through these is seen the starry southern night. On one side is a piano, on the other a table with papers neatly laid out on it. There is a lighted fire.*

LADY MERESTON, *in evening dress, rather magnificently attired, is reading the papers. She is a handsome woman of forty. She puts down the paper impatiently and rings the bell. A servant answers.*

LADY MERESTON: Did Mr. Paradine Fouldes come this evening?

SERVANT: Yes, miladi.

LADY MERESTON: Is he in the hotel now?

SERVANT: Yes, miladi.

LADY MERESTON: Will you send some one up to his room to say I'm waiting to see him?

SERVANT: Pardon, miladi, but the gentleman say 'e was on no account to be disturbed.

LADY MERESTON: Nonsense. Mr. Fouldes is my brother. You must go to him immediately.

SERVANT: Mr. Fouldes his valet is in the 'all. Will your ladyship speak with him?

LADY MERESTON: Mr. Fouldes is more difficult to see than a cabinet minister. Send his servant to me.

SERVANT: Very good, miladi.

[Exit SERVANT, and presently THOMPSON, Mr. Fouldes' man, comes in.]

THOMPSON: Your ladyship wished to see me.

LADY MERESTON: Good evening, Thompson. I hope you had a comfortable journey.

THOMPSON: Yes, my lady. Mr. Fouldes always has a comfortable journey.

LADY MERESTON: Was the sea calm when you crossed?

THOMPSON: Yes, my lady. Mr. Fouldes would look upon it as a great liberty if the sea was not calm.

LADY MERESTON: Will you tell Mr. Fouldes that I should like to see him at once?

THOMPSON: [Looking at his watch.] Excuse me, my lady, but Mr. Fouldes said no one was to disturb him till ten o'clock. It's more than my place is worth to go to him at five minutes to.

LADY MERESTON: But what on earth's he doing?

THOMPSON: I don't know at all, my lady.

LADY MERESTON: How long have you been with Mr. Fouldes?

THOMPSON: Twenty-five years, my lady.

LADY MERESTON: I should have thought you knew how he spent every minute of his day.

[PARADINE comes in. He is a very well-dressed man of forty-odd. Self-possessed, worldly, urbane. He is never at a loss or put out of countenance. He overhears LADY MERESTON's last words.]

FOULDES: When I engaged Thompson I told him the first thing he must learn was the very difficult feat of keeping his eyes open and shut at one and the same time.

LADY MERESTON: My dear Paradine, I've been waiting to see you for the last two hours. How tiresome you are.

FOULDES: You may give me a kiss, Maud, but don't be rough.

LADY MERESTON: [*Kissing his cheek.*] You ridiculous creature. You really might have come to see me at once.

FOULDES: My dear, you cannot grudge me a little repose after a long and tedious journey. I had to repair the ravages to my person caused by twenty-seven hours in the train.

LADY MERESTON: Don't be so absurd. I'm sure your person is never ravished.

FOULDES: Ravaged, my dear, ravaged. I should look upon it as an affectation at my age if I were not a little upset by the journey from London to Monte Carlo.

LADY MERESTON: I'll be bound you ate a very hearty dinner.

FOULDES: Thompson, did I eat any dinner at all?

THOMPSON: [*Stolidly.*] Soup, sir.

FOULDES: I remember looking at it.

THOMPSON: Fish, sir.

FOULDES: I trifled with a fried sole.

THOMPSON: Vol-au-vent Rossini, sir.

FOULDES: It has left absolutely no impression upon me.

THOMPSON: Tournedos à la Splendide.

FOULDES: They were distinctly tough, Thompson. You must lodge a complaint in the proper quarter.

THOMPSON: Roast pheasant, sir.

FOULDES: Yes, yes, now you mention it, I do remember the pheasant.

THOMPSON: Pêches Melba, sir.

FOULDES: They were too cold, Thompson. They were distinctly too cold.

LADY MERESTON: My dear Paradine, I think you dined uncommonly well.

FOULDES: I have reached an age when love, ambition and wealth pale into insignificance beside a really well-grilled steak. That'll do, Thompson.

THOMPSON: Very well, sir.

[He goes out.]

LADY MERESTON: It's too bad of you, Paradine, to devour a substantial meal when I'm eating out my very heart with anxiety.

FOULDES: It seems to agree with you very well. I've not seen you look better for years.

LADY MERESTON: For heaven's sake be serious and listen to me.

FOULDES: I started immediately I got your telegram. Pray tell me what I can do for you?

LADY MERESTON: My dear Paradine, Charlie's head over ears in love.

FOULDES: It's not altogether an unexpected condition for a young man of twenty-two. If the lady's respectable, marry him and resign yourself to being a dowager. If she's not, give her five hundred pounds and pack her off to Paris or London or wherever else she habitually practises her arts and graces.

LADY MERESTON: I wish I could. But who d'you think it is?

FOULDES: My dear, there's nothing I detest more than riddles. I can imagine quite a number of fair ladies who would look without disdain upon a young marquess with fifty thousand a year.

LADY MERESTON: Lady Frederick Berolles.

FOULDES: By Jupiter!

LADY MERESTON: She's fifteen years older than he is.

FOULDES: Then she's not old enough to be his mother, which is a distinct advantage.

LADY MERESTON: She dyes her hair.

FOULDES: She dyes it uncommonly well.

LADY MERESTON: She paints.

FOULDES: Much better than a Royal Academician.

LADY MERESTON: And poor Charlie's simply infatuated. He rides with her all the morning, motors with her all the afternoon, and gambles with her half the night. I never see him.

FOULDES: But why should you think Lady Frederick cares two straws for him?

LADY MERESTON: Don't be ridiculous, Paradine. Every one knows she hasn't a penny, and she's crippled with debts.

FOULDES: One has to keep up appearances in this world. Life nowadays for the woman of fashion is a dilemma of which one horn is the Bankruptcy Court and the other—the President of the Divorce Court.

LADY MERESTON: I wish I knew how she manages to dress so beautifully. It's one of the injustices of fate that clothes only hang on a woman really well when she's lost every shred of reputation.

FOULDES: My dear, you must console yourself with the thought that she'll probably frizzle for it hereafter.

LADY MERESTON: I hope I'm not wicked, Paradine, but to wear draperies and wings in the next world offers me no compensation for looking dowdy in a Paquin gown in this.

FOULDES: I surmised she was on the verge of bankruptcy when I heard she'd bought a new brougham. And you seriously think Charlie wants to marry her?

LADY MERESTON: I'm sure of it.

FOULDES: And what d'you want me to do?

LADY MERESTON: Good heavens, I want you to prevent it. After all he has a magnificent position; he's got every chance of making a career for himself. There's no reason

why he shouldn't be Prime Minister—it's not fair to the boy to let him marry a woman like that.

FOULDES: Of course you know Lady Frederick?

LADY MERESTON: My dear Paradine, we're the greatest friends. You don't suppose I'm going to give her the advantage of quarrelling with me. I think I shall ask her to luncheon to meet you.

FOULDES: Women have such an advantage over men in affairs of this sort. They're troubled by no scruples, and, like George Washington, never hesitate to lie.

LADY MERESTON: I look upon her as an abandoned creature, and I tell you frankly I shall stop at nothing to save my son from her clutches.

FOULDES: Only a thoroughly good woman could so calmly announce her intention of using the crookedest ways to gain her ends.

LADY MERESTON: [*Looking at him.*] There must be some incident in her career which she wouldn't like raked up. If we could only get hold of that. . . .

FOULDES: [*Blandly.*] How d'you imagine I can help you?

LADY MERESTON: A reformed burglar is always the best detective.

FOULDES: My dear, I wish you could be frank without being sententious.

LADY MERESTON: You've run through two fortunes, and if we all got our deserts you would be starving now instead of being richer than ever.

FOULDES: My second cousins have a knack of dying at the psychological moment.

LADY MERESTON: You've been a horrid, dissipated wretch all your life, and heaven knows the disreputable people who've been your bosom friends.

FOULDES: With my knowledge of the world and your entire

lack of scruple we should certainly be a match for one defenceless woman.

LADY MERESTON: Common report says that at one time you were very much in love with her.

FOULDES: Common report is an ass whose long ears only catch its own braying.

LADY MERESTON: I was wondering how far things went. If you could tell Charlie of the relations between you. . . .

FOULDES: My good Maud, there were no relations—unfortunately.

LADY MERESTON: Poor George was very uneasy about you at the time.

FOULDES: Your deceased husband, being a strictly religious man, made a point of believing the worst about his neighbours.

LADY MERESTON: Don't, Paradine; I know you didn't like one another, but remember that I loved him with all my heart. I shall never get over his death.

FOULDES: My dear girl, you know I didn't mean to wound you.

LADY MERESTON: After all, it was largely your fault. He was deeply religious, and as the president of the Broad Church Union he couldn't countenance your mode of life.

FOULDES: [*With great unction.*] Thank God in my day I've been a miserable sinner!

LADY MERESTON: [*Laughing.*] You're quite incurable, Paradine. But you will help me now. Since his father's death, the boy and I have lived a very retired life, and now we're quite helpless. It would break my heart if Charlie married that woman.

FOULDES: I'll do my best. I think I can promise you that nothing will come of it.

[*The door is flung open, and LADY FREDERICK enters, followed by MERESTON, a young man of twenty-two; by her brother, SIR GERALD O'MARA, a handsome fellow of six-and-twenty; by CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE, ADMIRAL CARLISLE, and ROSE, his daughter. LADY FREDERICK is a handsome Irish woman of thirty to thirty-five, beautifully dressed. She is very vivacious. She has all the Irish recklessness and unconcern for the morrow. Whenever she wants to get round anybody she falls into an Irish brogue, and then, as she knows very well, is quite irresistible. CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE is a polished, well-groomed man of thirty-five, with suave manners. THE ADMIRAL is bluff and downright. ROSE is a pretty ingénue of nineteen.*]

LADY MERESTON: Here they are.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Enthusiastically going to him with open arms.*]
Paradine! Paradine! Paradine!

MERESTON: Oh, my prophetic soul, mine uncle!

FOULDES: [*Shaking hands with LADY FREDERICK.*] I heard you were at the Casino.

LADY FREDERICK: Charlie lost all his money, so I brought him away.

LADY MERESTON: I wish you wouldn't gamble, Charlie dear.

MERESTON: My dear mother, I've only lost ten thousand francs.

LADY FREDERICK: [*To PARADINE FOULDES.*] I see you're in your usual robust health.

FOULDES: You needn't throw it in my face. I shall probably be very unwell to-morrow.

LADY FREDERICK: D'you know Admiral Carlisle? This is my brother Gerald.

FOULDES: [*Shaking hands.*] How d'you do?

LADY FREDERICK: [*Introducing.*] Captain Montgomerie.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: I think we've met before.

FOULDES: I'm very pleased to hear it. How d'you do. [*To MERESTON.*] Are you having a good time in Monte Carlo, Charles?

MERESTON: A 1, thanks.

FOULDES: And what do you do with yourself?

MERESTON: Oh, hang about generally, you know—and there's always the tables.

FOULDES: That's right, my boy; I'm glad to see that you prepare yourself properly for your duties as a hereditary legislator.

MERESTON: [*Laughing.*] Oh, shut it, Uncle Paradine.

FOULDES: I rejoice also to find that you have already a *certain command of the vernacular*.

MERESTON: Well, if you can browbeat a London cabby and hold your own in repartee with a barmaid, it oughtn't to be difficult to get on all right in the House of Lords.

FOULDES: But let me give you a solemn warning. You have a magnificent chance, dear boy, with all the advantages of wealth and station. I beseech you not to throw it away by any exhibition of talent. The field is clear and the British people are waiting for a leader. But remember that the British people like their leaders dull. Capacity they mistrust, versatility they cannot bear, and wit they utterly abhor. Look at the fate of poor Lord Parnaby. His urbanity gained him the premiership, but his brilliancy overthrew him. How could the fortunes of the nation be safe with a man whose speeches were pointed and sparkling, whose mind was so quick, so agile, that it reminded you of a fencer's play? Every one is agreed that Lord Parnaby is flippant and unsubstantial; we doubt his principles and we have grave fears about his morality. Take warning, my dear boy, take warning. Let the sprightly epigram never lighten the long periods of your speech nor the Attic salt flavour the roast beef of your

conversation. Be careful that your metaphors show no imagination and conceal your brains as you would a discreditable secret. Above all, if you have a sense of humour, crush it. Crush it.

MERESTON: My dear uncle, you move me very much. I will be as stupid as an owl.

FOULDES: There's a good, brave boy.

MERESTON: I will be heavy and tedious.

FOULDES: I see already the riband of the Garter adorning your shirt-front. Remember, there's no damned merit about that.

MERESTON: None shall listen to my speeches without falling into a profound sleep.

FOULDES: [*Seizing his hand.*] The premiership itself is within your grasp.

LADY MERESTON: Dear Paradine, let us take a stroll on the terrace before we go to bed.

FOULDES: And you shall softly whisper all the latest scandal in my ear.

[He puts on her cloak and they go out.]

LADY FREDERICK: May I speak to you, Admiral?

ADMIRAL: Certainly, certainly. What can I do for you?

[While LADY FREDERICK and the ADMIRAL talk, the others go slowly out. Through the conversation she uses her Irish brogue.]

LADY FREDERICK: Are you in a good temper?

ADMIRAL: Fairly, fairly.

LADY FREDERICK: I'm glad of that because I want to make you a proposal of marriage.

ADMIRAL: My dear Lady Frederick, you take me entirely by surprise.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Laughing.*] Not on my own behalf, you know.

ADMIRAL: Oh, I see.

LADY FREDERICK: The fact is, my brother Gerald has asked your daughter to marry him, and she has accepted.

ADMIRAL: Rose is a minx, Lady Frederick, and she's much too young to marry.

LADY FREDERICK: Now don't fly into a passion. We're going to talk it over quite calmly.

ADMIRAL: I tell you I won't hear of it. The boy's penniless.

LADY FREDERICK: That's why it's so lucky you're rich.

ADMIRAL: Eh?

LADY FREDERICK: You've been talking of buying a place in Ireland. You couldn't want anything nicer than Gerald's —gravel soil, you know. And you simply dote on Elizabethan architecture.

ADMIRAL: I can't bear it.

LADY FREDERICK: How fortunate, then, that the house was burnt down in the eighteenth century and rebuilt in the best Georgian style.

ADMIRAL: Ugh.

LADY FREDERICK: And you'd love to have little grandsons to dandle on your knee.

ADMIRAL: How do I know they wouldn't be girls?

LADY FREDERICK: Oh, it's most unusual in our family.

ADMIRAL: I tell you I won't hear of it.

LADY FREDERICK: You know, it's not bad to have the oldest baronetcy in the country but one.

ADMIRAL: I suppose I shall have to pack Rose off to England.

LADY FREDERICK: And break her heart?

ADMIRAL: Women's hearts are like old china, none the worse for a break or two.

LADY FREDERICK: Did you ever know my husband, Admiral?

ADMIRAL: Yes.

LADY FREDERICK: I was married to him at seventeen because my mother thought it a good match, and I was desperately in love with another man. Before we'd been married a fortnight he came home blind drunk, and I had never seen a drunken man before. Then I found out he was a confirmed tippler. I was so ashamed. If you only knew what my life was for the ten years I lived with him. I've done a lot of foolish things in my time, but, my God, I have suffered.

ADMIRAL: Yes, I know, I know.

LADY FREDERICK: And believe me, when two young things love one another it's better to let them marry. Love is so very rare in this world. One really ought to make the most of it when it's there.

ADMIRAL: I'm very sorry, but I've made up my mind.

LADY FREDERICK: Ah, but won't you alter it—like Nelson. Don't be hard on Rose. She's really in love with Gerald. Do give them a chance. Won't you? Ah, do—there's a dear.

ADMIRAL: I don't want to hurt your feelings, but Sir Gerald is about the most ineligible young man that I've ever come across.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Triumphantly.*] There, I knew we should agree. That's precisely what I told him this morning.

ADMIRAL: I understand his place is heavily mortgaged.

LADY FREDERICK: No one will lend a penny more on it. If they would Gerald would borrow it at once.

ADMIRAL: He's got nothing but his pay to live upon.

LADY FREDERICK: And his tastes are very extravagant.

ADMIRAL: He's a gambler.

LADY FREDERICK: Yes, but then he's so good looking.

ADMIRAL: Eh?

LADY FREDERICK: I'm glad that we agree so entirely about him. Now there's nothing left but to call the young

things in, join their hands and give them our united blessing.

ADMIRAL: Before I consent to this marriage, madam, I'll see your brother——

LADY FREDERICK: Damned?

ADMIRAL: Yes, madam, damned.

LADY FREDERICK: Now listen to me quietly, will you?

ADMIRAL: I should warn you, Lady Frederick, that when I once make up my mind about a thing, I never change it.

LADY FREDERICK: Now that is what I really admire. I like a man of character. You know, I've always been impressed by your strength and determination.

ADMIRAL: I don't know about that. But when I say a thing, I do it.

LADY FREDERICK: Yes, I know. And in five minutes you're going to say that Gerald may marry your pretty Rose.

ADMIRAL: No, no, no.

LADY FREDERICK: Now look here, don't be obstinate. I don't like you when you're obstinate.

ADMIRAL: I'm not obstinate. I'm firm.

LADY FREDERICK: After all, Gerald has lots of good qualities. He's simply devoted to your daughter. He's been a little wild, but you know you wouldn't give much for a young man who hadn't.

ADMIRAL: [*Gruffly.*] I don't want a milksop for a son-in-law.

LADY FREDERICK: As soon as he's married, he'll settle into a model country squire.

ADMIRAL: Well, he's a gambler, and I can't get over that.

LADY FREDERICK: Shall he promise you never to play cards again? Now, don't be horrid. You don't want to make me utterly wretched, do you?

ADMIRAL: [*Unwillingly.*] Well, I'll tell you what I'll do—they shall marry if he doesn't gamble for a year.

LADY FREDERICK: Oh, you duck. [*She impulsively throws her arms round his neck and kisses him. He is a good deal taken aback.*] I beg your pardon, I couldn't help it.

ADMIRAL: I don't altogether object, you know.

LADY FREDERICK: Upon my word, in some ways you're rather fascinating.

ADMIRAL: D'you think so, really?

LADY FREDERICK: I do indeed.

ADMIRAL: I rather wish that proposal of marriage had been on your own behalf.

LADY FREDERICK: Ah, with me, dear Admiral, experience triumphs over hope. I must tell the children. [*Calling.*] Gerald, come here. Rose.

[*GERALD and ROSE come in.*]

LADY FREDERICK: I always knew your father was a perfect darling, Rose.

ROSE: Oh, papa, you are a brick.

ADMIRAL: I thoroughly disapprove of the marriage, my dear, but—it's not easy to say no to Lady Frederick.

GERALD: It's awfully good of you, Admiral, and I'll do my best to make Rose a ripping husband.

ADMIRAL: Not so fast, young man, not so fast. There's a condition.

ROSE: Oh, father!

LADY FREDERICK: Gerald is to behave himself for a year, and then you may marry.

ROSE: But won't Gerald grow very dull if he behaves himself?

LADY FREDERICK: I have no doubt of it. But dullness is the first requisite of a good husband.

ADMIRAL: Now you must pack off to bed, my dear. I'm going to smoke my pipe before turning in.

ROSE: [*Kissing* LADY FREDERICK.] Good-night, dearest, I'll never forget your kindness.

LADY FREDERICK: You'd better not thank me till you've been married a few years.

ROSE: [*Holding out her hand to* GERALD.] Good-night.

GERALD: [*Taking it and looking at her.*] Good-night.

ADMIRAL: [*Gruffly.*] You may as well do it in front of my face as behind my back.

ROSE: [*Lifting up her lips.*] Good-night.

[*He kisses her, and the ADMIRAL and ROSE go out.*]

LADY FREDERICK: Oh lord, I wish I were eighteen.

[*She sinks into a chair, and an expression of utter weariness comes over her face.*]

GERALD: I say, what's up?

LADY FREDERICK: [*Starting.*] I thought you'd gone. Nothing.

GERALD: Come, out with it.

LADY FREDERICK: Oh, my poor boy, if you only knew. I'm so worried that I don't know what on earth to do.

GERALD: Money?

LADY FREDERICK: Last year I made a solemn determination to be economical. And it's ruined me.

GERALD: My dear, how could it?

LADY FREDERICK: I can't make it out. It seems very unfair. The more I tried not to be extravagant, the more I spent.

GERALD: Can't you borrow.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Laughing.*] I have borrowed. That's just it.

GERALD: Well, borrow again.

LADY FREDERICK: I've tried to. But no one's such a fool as to lend me a penny.

GERALD: Did you say I'd sign anything they liked?

LADY FREDERICK: I was so desperate I said we'd both sign anything. It was Dick Cohen.

GERALD: Oh lord, what did he say?

LADY FREDERICK: [*Imitating a Jewish accent.*] What's the good of wathting a nithe clean sheet of paper, my dear lady?

GERALD: [*Shouting with laughter.*] By George, don't I know it.

LADY FREDERICK: For heaven's sake don't let's talk of my affairs. They're in such a state that if I think of them at all I shall have a violent fit of hysterics.

GERALD: But look here, what d'you really mean?

LADY FREDERICK: Well, if you want it—I owe my dress-maker seven hundred pounds, and last year I signed two horrid bills, one for fifteen hundred and the other for two thousand. They fall due the day after to-morrow, and if I can't raise the money I shall have to go through the Bankruptcy Court.

GERALD: By George, that's serious.

LADY FREDERICK: It's so serious that I can't help thinking something will happen. Whenever I've got in a really tight fix something has turned up and put me on my legs again. Last time, Aunt Elizabeth had an apoplectic fit. But of course it wasn't really very profitable because mourning is so desperately expensive.

GERALD: Why don't you marry?

LADY FREDERICK: Oh, my dear Gerald, you know I'm always unlucky at games of chance.

GERALD: Charlie Mereston's awfully gone on you.

LADY FREDERICK: That must be obvious to the meanest intelligence.

GERALD: Well, why don't you have him?

LADY FREDERICK: Good heavens, I'm old enough to be his mother.

GERALD: Nonsense. You're only ten years older than he is,

and nowadays no nice young man marries a woman younger than himself.

LADY FREDERICK: He's such a good fellow. I couldn't do him a nasty turn like that.

GERALD: How about Montgomerie? He simply stinks of money, and he's not a bad sort.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Surprised.*] My dear boy, I hardly know him.

GERALD: Well, I'm afraid it means marriage or bankruptcy.

LADY FREDERICK: Here's Charlie. Take him away, there's a dear. I want to talk to Paradine.

[*Enter PARADINE FOULDES with MERESTON.*]

FOULDES: What, still here, Lady Frederick?

LADY FREDERICK: As large as life.

FOULDES: We've been taking a turn on the terrace.

LADY FREDERICK: [*To MERESTON.*] And has your astute uncle been pumping you, Charlie?

FOULDES: Eh, what?

MERESTON: I don't think he got much out of me.

FOULDES: [*Good-naturedly.*] All I wanted, dear boy. There's no one so transparent as the person who thinks he's devilish deep. By the way, what's the time?

GERALD: About eleven, isn't it?

FOULDES: Ah! How old are you, Charlie?

MERESTON: Twenty-two.

FOULDES: Then it's high time you went to bed.

LADY FREDERICK: Charlie's not going to bed till I tell him. Are you?

MERESTON: Of course not.

FOULDES: Has it escaped your acute intelligence, my friend that I want to talk to Lady Frederick?

MERESTON: Not at all. But I have no reason to believe that Lady Frederick wants to talk to you.

GERALD: Let's go and have a game of pills, Charlie.

MERESTON: D'you want to be left alone with the old villain?

FOULDES: You show no respect for my dyed hairs, young man.

LADY FREDERICK: I've not seen him for years, you know.

MERESTON: Oh, all right. I say, you're coming for a drive to-morrow, aren't you?

LADY FREDERICK: Certainly. But it must be in the afternoon.

FOULDES: I'm sorry, but Charles has arranged to go to Nice with me in the afternoon.

MERESTON: [*To LADY FREDERICK.*] That'll suit me A 1. I had an engagement, but it was quite unimportant.

LADY FREDERICK: Then that's settled. Good-night.

MERESTON: Good-night.

[*He goes out with GERALD. LADY FREDERICK turns and good-humouredly scrutinises PARADINE FOULDES.*]

LADY FREDERICK: Well?

FOULDES: Well?

LADY FREDERICK: You wear excellently, Paradine.

FOULDES: Thanks.

LADY FREDERICK: How do you manage it?

FOULDES: By getting up late and never going to bed early, by eating whatever I like and drinking whenever I'm thirsty, by smoking strong cigars, taking no exercise, and refusing under any circumstances to be bored.

LADY FREDERICK: I'm sorry you had to leave town in such a hurry. Were you amusing yourself?

FOULDES: I come to the Riviera every year.

LADY FREDERICK: I daresay, but not so early.

FOULDES: I've never surrendered so far to middle age as to make habits.

LADY FREDERICK: My dear Paradine, the day before yesterday, Lady Mereston, quite distracted, went to the post office and sent you the following wire: Come at once, your help urgently needed. Charlie in toils designing female, Maud. Am I right?

FOULDES: I never admit even to myself that a well-dressed woman is wrong.

LADY FREDERICK: So you started post-haste, bent upon protecting your nephew, and were infinitely surprised to learn that the designing female was no other than your humble servant.

FOULDES: You'd be irresistible, Lady Frederick, if you didn't know you were so clever.

LADY FREDERICK: And now what are you going to do?

FOULDES: My dear lady, I'm not a police officer, but a very harmless, inoffensive old bachelor.

LADY FREDERICK: With more wiles than the mother of many daughters and the subtlety of a company promoter.

FOULDES: Maud seems to think that as I've racketted about a little in my time, I'm just the sort of man to deal with you. Set a thief to catch a thief, don't you know? She's rather fond of proverbs.

LADY FREDERICK: She should have thought rather of: When Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug of war. I hear Lady Mereston has been saying the most agreeable things about me.

FOULDES: Ah, that's women's fault; they always show their hand. You're the only woman I ever knew who didn't.

LADY FREDERICK: [*With a brogue.*] You should have avoided the Blarney Stone when you went to Ireland.

FOULDES: Look here, d'you want to marry Charlie?

LADY FREDERICK: Why should I?

FOULDES: Because he's got fifty thousand a year, and you're head over ears in debt. You've got to raise something like four thousand pounds at once, or you go under. You've got yourself a good deal talked about during the last ten years, but people have stood you because you had plenty of money. If you go broke they'll drop you like a hot potato. And I daresay it wouldn't be inconvenient to change Lady Frederick Berolles into Lady Mereston. My sister has always led me to believe that it is rather attractive to be a Marchioness.

LADY FREDERICK: Unlike a duchess, it's cheap without being gaudy.

FOULDES: You asked me why you might want to marry a boy from ten to fifteen years younger than yourself, and I've told you.

LADY FREDERICK: And now perhaps you'll tell me why you're going to interfere in my private concerns?

FOULDES: Well, you see his mother happens to be my sister, and I'm rather fond of her. It's true her husband was the most sanctimonious prig I've ever met in my life.

LADY FREDERICK: I remember him well. He was president of the Broad Church Union and wore side-whiskers.

FOULDES: But she stuck to me through thick and thin. I've been in some pretty tight places in my day, and she's always given me a leg up when I wanted it. I've got an idea it would just about break her heart if Charlie married you.

LADY FREDERICK: Thanks.

FOULDES: You know, I don't want to be offensive, but I think it would be a pity myself. And besides, unless I'm much mistaken, I've got a little score of my own that I want to pay off.

LADY FREDERICK: Have you?

FOULDES: You've got a good enough memory not to have forgotten that you made a blithering fool of me once. }

swore I'd get even with you, and by George, I mean to do it.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Laughing.*] And how do you propose to stop me if I make up my mind that I'm going to accept Charlie?

FOULDES: Well, he's not proposed yet, has he?

LADY FREDERICK: Not yet, but I've had to use every trick and device I can think of to prevent him.

FOULDES: Look here, I'm going to play this game with my cards on the table.

LADY FREDERICK: Then I shall be on my guard. You're never so dangerous as when you pretend to be frank.

FOULDES: I'm sorry you should think so badly of me.

LADY FREDERICK: I don't. Only it was a stroke of genius when Nature put the soul of a Jesuit priest into the body of a Yorkshire squire.

FOULDES: I wonder what you're paying me compliments for. You must be rather afraid of me.

[They look at one another for a moment.]

LADY FREDERICK: Well, let's look at these cards.

FOULDES: First of all, there's this money you've got to raise.

LADY FREDERICK: Well?

FOULDES: This is my sister's suggestion.

LADY FREDERICK: That means you don't much like it.

FOULDES: If you'll refuse the boy and clear out—we'll give you forty thousand pounds.

LADY FREDERICK: I suppose you'd be rather surprised if I boxed your ears.

FOULDES: Now, look here, between you and me high falutin's rather absurd, don't you think? You're in desperate want of money, and I don't suppose it would amuse you much to have a young hobbledohoy hanging about your skirts for the rest of your life.

LADY FREDERICK: Very well, we'll have no high falutin! You may tell Lady Mereston that if I really wanted the money I shouldn't be such an idiot as to take forty thousand down when I can have fifty thousand a year for the asking.

FOULDES: I told her that.

LADY FREDERICK: You showed great perspicacity. Now for the second card.

FOULDES: My dear, it's no good getting into a paddy over it.

LADY FREDERICK: I've never been calmer in my life.

FOULDES: You always had the very deuce of a temper. I suppose you've not given Charlie a sample of it yet, have you?

LADY FREDERICK: [*Laughing.*] Not yet.

FOULDES: Well, the second card's your reputation.

LADY FREDERICK: But I haven't got any. I thought that such an advantage.

FOULDES: You see, Charlie is a young fool. He thinks you a paragon of all the virtues, and it's never occurred to him that you've rather gone the pace in your time.

LADY FREDERICK: It's one of my greatest consolations to think that.

FOULDES: Still it'll be rather a shock to Charlie when he hears that this modest flower whom he trembles to adore has. . . .

LADY FREDERICK: Very nearly eloped with his own uncle. But you won't tell him that story because you hate looking a perfect ass.

FOULDES: Madam, when duty calls, Paradine Fouldes consents even to look ridiculous. But I was thinking of the Bellingham affair.

LADY FREDERICK: Ah, of course, there's the Bellingham affair. I'd forgotten it.

FOULDES: Nasty little business, that, eh?

LADY FREDERICK: Horrid.

FOULDES: Don't you think it would choke him off?

LADY FREDERICK: I think it very probable.

FOULDES: Well, hadn't you better cave in?

LADY FREDERICK: [*Ringing the bell.*] Ah, but you've not seen my cards yet. [*A servant enters.*] Tell my servant to bring down the despatch-box which is on my writing-table.

SERVANT: Yes, miladi.

[*Exit.*]

FOULDES: What's up now?

LADY FREDERICK: Well, four or five years ago I was staying at this hotel, and Mimi la Bretonne had rooms here.

FOULDES: I never heard of the lady, but her name suggests that she had an affectionate nature.

LADY FREDERICK: She was a little singer at the Folies Bergères, and she had the loveliest emeralds I ever saw.

FOULDES: But you don't know Maud's.

LADY FREDERICK: The late Lord Mereston had a passion for emeralds. He always thought they were such pure stones.

FOULDES: [*Quickly.*] I beg your pardon?

LADY FREDERICK: Well, Mimi fell desperately ill, and there was no one to look after her. Of course the pious English ladies in the hotel wouldn't go within a mile of her, so I went and did the usual thing, don't you know.

[*LADY FREDERICK's man comes in with a small despatch-box which he places on a table. He goes out. LADY FREDERICK as she talks, unlocks it.*]

FOULDES: Thank God I'm a bachelor, and no ministering angel ever smooths my pillow when I particularly want to be left alone.

LADY FREDERICK: I nursed her more or less through the whole illness, and afterwards she fancied she owed me her worthless little life. She wanted to give me the

precious emeralds, and when I refused was so heart-broken that I said I'd take one thing if I might.

FOULDES: And what was that?

LADY FREDERICK: A bundle of letters. I'd seen the address on the back of the envelope, and then I recognised the writing. I thought they'd be much safer in my hands than in hers. [*She takes them out of the box and hands them to PARADINE.*] Here they are.

[*He looks and starts violently.*]

FOULDES: 89 Grosvenor Square. It's Merceston's writing. You don't mean? What! Ah, ah, ah. [*He bursts into a shout of laughter.*] The old sinner. And Merceston wouldn't have me in the house, if you please, because I was a dissolute libertine. And he was the president of the Broad Church Union. Good Lord, how often have I heard him say: "Gentlemen, I take my stand on the morality, the cleanliness and the purity of English Family life." Oh, oh, oh.

LADY FREDERICK: I've often noticed that the religious temperament is very susceptible to the charms of my sex.

FOULDES: May I look?

LADY FREDERICK: Well. I don't know. I suppose so.

FOULDES: [*Reading.*] "Heart's delight" . . . And he signs himself, "your darling chickabiddy." The old ruffian.

LADY FREDERICK: She was a very pretty little thing.

FOULDES: I daresay, but thank heaven, I have some sense of decency left, and it outrages all my susceptibilities that a man in side-whiskers should call himself anybody's chickabiddy.

LADY FREDERICK: Protestations of undying affection are never ridiculous when they are accompanied by such splendid emeralds.

FOULDES: [*Starting and growing suddenly serious.*] And what about Maud?

LADY FREDERICK: Well?

FOULDES: Poor girl, it'd simply break her heart. He preached at her steadily for twenty years, and she worshipped the very ground he trod on. She'd have died of grief at his death except she felt it her duty to go on with his work.

LADY FREDERICK: I know.

FOULDES: By Jove, it's a good card. You were quite right to refuse the emeralds: these letters are twice as valuable.

LADY FREDERICK: Would you like to burn them?

FOULDES: Betsy!

LADY FREDERICK: There's the fire. Put them in.

[He takes them up in both hands and hurries to the fire. But he stops and brings them back, he throws them on the sofa.]

FOULDES: No, I won't.

LADY FREDERICK: Why not?

FOULDES: It's too dooced generous. I'll fight you tooth and nail, but it's not fair to take an advantage over me like that. You'll bind my hands with fetters.

LADY FREDERICK: Very well. You've had your chance.

FOULDES: But, by Jove, you must have a good hand to throw away a card like that. What have you got—a straight flush?

LADY FREDERICK: I may be only bluffing, you know.

FOULDES: Lord, it does me good to hear your nice old Irish brogue again.

LADY FREDERICK: Faith, and does it?

FOULDES: I believe you only put it on to get over people.

LADY FREDERICK: *[Smiling.]* Begorra, it's not easy to get over you.

FOULDES: Lord, I was in love with you once, wasn't I?

LADY FREDERICK: Not more than lots of other people have been.

FOULDES: And you did treat me abominably.

LADY FREDERICK: Ah, that's what they all said. But you got over it very well.

FOULDES: I didn't. My digestion was permanently impaired by your brutal treatment.

LADY FREDERICK: Is that why you went to Carlsbad afterwards instead of the Rocky Mountains?

FOULDES: You may laugh, but the fact remains that I've only been in love once, and that was with you.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Smiling as she holds out her hand.*] Good-night.

FOULDES: For all that I'm going to fight you now for all I'm worth.

LADY FREDERICK: I'm not frightened of you, Paradine.

FOULDES: Good-night.

[*As he goes out, CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE enters.*]

LADY FREDERICK: [*Yawning and stretching her arms.*] Oh I'm so sleepy.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: I'm sorry for that. I wanted to have a talk with you.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Smiling.*] I daresay I can keep awake for five minutes, you know—especially if you offer me a cigarette.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: Here you are.

[*He hands her his case and lights her cigarette.*]

LADY FREDERICK: [*With a sigh.*] Oh, what a comfort.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: I wanted to tell you, I had a letter this morning from my solicitor to say that he's just bought Crowley Castle on my behalf.

LADY FREDERICK: Really. But it's a lovely place. You must ask me to come and stay.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: I should like you to stay there indefinitely.

LADY FREDERICK: [*With a quick look.*] That's charming of you, but I never desert my London long.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: [*Smiling.*] I have a very nice house in Portman Square.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Surprised.*] Really?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: And I'm thinking of going into Parliament at the next election.

LADY FREDERICK: It appears to be a very delightful pastime to govern the British nation, dignified without being laborious.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: Lady Frederick, although I've been in the service I have rather a good head for business, and I hate beating about the bush. I wanted to ask you to marry me.

LADY FREDERICK: It's nice of you not to make a fuss about it. I'm very much obliged but I'm afraid I can't.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: Why not?

LADY FREDERICK: Well, you see, I don't know you.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: We could spend the beginning of our married life so usefully in making one another's acquaintance.

LADY FREDERICK: It would be rather late in the day then to come to the conclusion that we couldn't bear the sight of one another.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: Shall I send my banker's book so that you may see that my antecedents are respectable and my circumstances—such as to inspire affection.

LADY FREDERICK: I have no doubt it would be very interesting—but not to me.

[*She makes as if to go.*]

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: Ah, don't go yet. Won't you give me some reason?

LADY FREDERICK: If you insist. I'm not in the least in love with you.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: D'you think that much matters?

LADY FREDERICK: You're a friend of Gerald's, and he says you're a very good sort. But I really can't marry every one that Gerald rather likes.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: He said he'd put in a good word for me.

LADY FREDERICK: If I ever marry again it shall be to please myself, not to please my brother.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: I hope I shall induce you to change your mind.

LADY FREDERICK: I'm afraid I can give you no hope of that.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: You know, when I determine to do a thing, I generally do it.

LADY FREDERICK: That sounds very like a threat.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: You may take it as such if you please.

LADY FREDERICK: And you've made up your mind that you're going to marry me?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: Quite.

LADY FREDERICK: Well, I've made up mine that you shan't. So we're quits.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: Why don't you talk to your brother about it?

LADY FREDERICK: Because it's no business of his.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: Isn't it? Ask him!

LADY FREDERICK: What do you mean by that?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: Ask him? Good-night.

LADY FREDERICK: Good-night. [*He goes out. LADY FREDERICK goes to the window that leads on to the terrace and calls.*] Gerald!

GERALD: Hulloal [*He appears and comes into the room.*

LADY FREDERICK: Did you know that Captain Montgomerie was going to propose to me?

GERALD: Yes.

LADY FREDERICK: Is there any reason why I should marry him?

GERALD: Only that I owe him nine hundred pounds.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Aghast.*] Oh, why didn't you tell me?

GERALD: You were so worried, I couldn't. Oh, I've been such a fool. I tried to make a *coup* for Rose's sake.

LADY FREDERICK: Is it a gambling debt?

GERALD: Yes.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Ironically.*] What they call a debt of honour?

GERALD: I must pay it the day after to-morrow without fail.

LADY FREDERICK: But that's the day my two bills fall due. And if you don't?

GERALD: I shall have to send in my papers, and I shall lose Rosie. And then I shall blow out my silly brains.

LADY FREDERICK: But who is the man?

GERALD: He's the son of Aaron Levitzki, the money-lender.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Half-comic, half-aghast.*] Oh lord!

END OF THE FIRST ACT

THE SECOND ACT

The scene is the same as in ACT I. ADMIRAL CARLISLE is sleeping in an armchair with a handkerchief over his face. ROSE is sitting in a grandfather's chair, and GERALD is leaning over the back.

ROSE: Isn't papa a perfectly adorable chaperon?

[*The ADMIRAL snores.*

GERALD: Perfectly.

[*A pause.*

ROSE: I've started fifteen topics of conversation in the last quarter of an hour, Gerald.

GERALD: [*Smiling.*] Have you?

ROSE: You always agree with me, and there's an end of it. So I have to rack my brains again.

GERALD: All you say is so very wise and sensible. Of course I agree.

ROSE: I wonder if you'll think me sensible and wise in ten years.

GERALD: I'm quite sure I shall.

ROSE: Why, then, I'm afraid we shan't cultivate any great brilliancy of repartee.

GERALD: Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever.

ROSE: Oh, don't say that. When a man's in love, he at once makes a pedestal of the Ten Commandments and stands on the top of them with his arms akimbo. When a woman's in love she doesn't care two straws for Thou Shalt and Thou Shalt Not.

GERALD: When a woman's in love she can put her heart on the slide of a microscope and examine how it beats. When a man's in love, what do you think he cares for science and philosophy and all the rest of it!

ROSE: When a man's in love he can only write sonnets to the moon. When a woman's in love she can still cook his dinner and darn her own stockings.

GERALD: I wish you wouldn't cap all my observations.

[She lifts up her face, and he kisses her lips.]

ROSE: I'm beginning to think you're rather nice, you know.

GERALD: That's reassuring, at all events.

ROSE: But no one could accuse you of being a scintillating talker.

GERALD: Have you ever watched the lovers in the Park sitting on the benches hour after hour without saying a word?

ROSE: Why?

GERALD: Because I've always thought that they must be bored to the verge of tears. Now I know they're only happy.

ROSE: You're certainly my soldier, so I suppose I'm your nursery-maid.

GERALD: You know, when I was at Trinity College, Dublin.

ROSE: *[Interrupting.]* Were you there? I thought you went to Oxford.

GERALD: No, why?

ROSE: Only all my people go to Magdalen.

GERALD: Yes.

ROSE: And I've decided that if I ever have a son he shall go there too.

[The ADMIRAL starts and pulls the handkerchief off his face. The others do not notice him. He is astounded at the conversation. LADY FREDERICK comes in later and stands smiling as she listens.]

GERALD: My darling, you know I hate to thwart you in any way, but I've quite made up my mind that my son shall go to Dublin as I did.

ROSE: I'm awfully sorry, Gerald, but the boy must be educated like a gentleman.

GERALD: There I quite agree, Rose, but first of all he's an Irishman, and it's right that he should be educated in Ireland.

ROSE: Darling Gerald, a mother's love is naturally the safest guide in these things.

GERALD: Dearest Rose, a father's wisdom is always the most reliable.

LADY FREDERICK: Pardon my interfering, but—aren't you just a little previous?

ADMIRAL: [*Bursting out.*] Did you ever hear such a conversation in your life between a young unmarried couple?

ROSE: My dear papa, we must be prepared for everything.

ADMIRAL: In my youth young ladies did not refer to things of that sort.

LADY FREDERICK: Well, I don't suppose they're any the worse for having an elementary knowledge of natural history. Personally I doubt whether ignorance is quite the same thing as virtue, and I'm not quite sure that a girl makes a better wife because she's been brought up like a perfect fool.

ADMIRAL: I am old-fashioned, Lady Frederick; and my idea of a modest girl is that when certain topics are mentioned she should swoon. Swoon, madam, swoon. They always did it when I was a lad.

ROSE: Well, father, I've often tried to faint when I wanted something that you wouldn't give me, and I've never been able to manage it. So I'm sure I couldn't swoon.

ADMIRAL: And with regard to this ridiculous discussion as to which University your son is to be sent, you seem to forget that I have the right to be consulted.

GERALD: My dear Admiral, I don't see how it can possibly matter to you.

ADMIRAL: And before we go any further I should like you to know that the very day Rose was born I determined that her son should go to Cambridge.

ROSE: My dear papa, I think Gerald and I are far and away the best judges of our son's welfare.

ADMIRAL: The boy must work, Rose. I will have no good-for-nothing as my grandson.

GERALD: Exactly. And that is why I'm resolved he shall go to Dublin.

ROSE: The important thing is that he should have really nice manners and that they teach at Oxford if they teach nothing else.

LADY FREDERICK: Well, don't you think you'd better wait another twenty years or so before you discuss this?

ADMIRAL: There are some matters which must be settled at once, Lady Frederick.

LADY FREDERICK: You know, young things are fairly independent nowadays. I don't know what they'll be in twenty years' time.

GERALD: The first thing the boy shall learn is obedience.

ROSE: Certainly. There's nothing so hateful as a disobedient child.

ADMIRAL: I can't see my grandson venturing to disobey me.

LADY FREDERICK: Then you're all agreed. So that's settled. I came to tell you your carriage was ready.

ADMIRAL: Go and put on your bonnet, Rose. [To LADY FREDERICK.] Are you coming with us?

LADY FREDERICK: I'm afraid I can't. Au revoir.

ADMIRAL: A tout à l'heure.

[*He and ROSE go out*]

GERALD: Have you ever seen in your life any one so entirely delightful as Rose?

LADY FREDERICK: [*Laughing.*] Only when I've looked in the glass.

GERALD: My dear Elizabeth, how vain you are.

LADY FREDERICK: You're very happy, my Gerald.

GERALD: It's such a relief to have got over all the difficulties. I thought it never would come right. You are a brick, Elizabeth.

LADY FREDERICK: I really think I am rather.

GERALD: The moment you promised to arrange things I felt as safe as a house.

LADY FREDERICK: I said I'd do my best, didn't I? And I told you not to worry.

GERALD: [*Turning round suddenly.*] Isn't it all right?

LADY FREDERICK: No, it's about as wrong as it can possibly be. I knew Cohen was staying here, and I thought I could get him to hold the bills over for a few days.

GERALD: And won't he?

LADY FREDERICK: He hasn't got them any more.

GERALD: [*Startled.*] What!

LADY FREDERICK: They've been negotiated, and he swears he doesn't know who has them.

GERALD: But who could have been such a fool?

LADY FREDERICK: I don't know, that's just the awful part of it. It was bad enough before. I knew the worst Cohen could do, but now. . . . It couldn't be Paradine.

GERALD: And then there's Montgomerie.

LADY FREDERICK: I shall see him to-day.

GERALD: What are you going to say to him?

LADY FREDERICK: I haven't an idea. I'm rather frightened of him.

GERALD: You know, dear, if the worst comes to the worst. . .

LADY FREDERICK: Whatever happens you shall marry Rose. I promise you that.

[PARADINE FOULDES *appears*.

FOULDES: May I come in?

LADY FREDERICK: [*Gaily.*] It's a public room. I don't see how we can possibly prevent you.

GERALD: I'm just going to take a stroll.

LADY FREDERICK: Do.

[*He goes out.*]

FOULDES: Well? How are things going?

LADY FREDERICK: Quite well, thank you.

FOULDES: I've left Charlie with his mother. I hope you can spare him for a couple of hours.

LADY FREDERICK: I told him he must spend the afternoon with her. I don't approve of his neglecting his filial duty.

FOULDES: Ah! . . . I saw Dick Cohen this morning.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Quickly.*] Did you?

FOULDES: It seems to interest you?

LADY FREDERICK: Not at all. Why should it?

FOULDES: [*Smiling.*] Nice little man, isn't he?

LADY FREDERICK: [*Good humouredly.*] I wish I had something to throw at you.

FOULDES: [*With a laugh.*] Well, I haven't got the confounded bills. I was too late.

LADY FREDERICK: Did you try?

FOULDES: Oh—yes. I thought it would interest Charlie to know how extremely needful it was for you to marry him.

LADY FREDERICK: Then who on earth has got them?

FOULDES: I haven't an idea, but they must make you very uncomfortable. Three thousand five hundred, eh?

LADY FREDERICK: Don't say it all at once. It sounds so much.

FOULDES: You wouldn't like to exchange those letters of Mereston's for seven thousand pounds, would you?

LADY FREDERICK: [*Laughing.*] No.

FOULDES: Ah. . . . By the way, d'you mind if I tell Charlie the full story of your—relations with me?

LADY FREDERICK: Why should I? It's not I who'll look ridiculous.

FOULDES: Thanks. I may avail myself of your permission.

LADY FREDERICK: I daresay you've noticed that Charlie has a very keen sense of humour.

FOULDES: If you're going to be disagreeable to me I shall go.
[*He stops.*] I say, are you quite sure there's nothing else that can be brought up against you?

LADY FREDERICK: [*Laughing.*] Quite sure, thanks.

FOULDES: My sister's very jubilant to-day. What about the Bellingham affair?

LADY FREDERICK: Merely scandal, my friend.

FOULDES: Well, look out. She's a woman, and she'll stick at nothing.

LADY FREDERICK: I wonder why you warn me.

FOULDES: For the sake of old times, my dear.

LADY FREDERICK: You're growing sentimental, Paradine.
It's the punishment which the gods inflict on a cynic when he grows old.

FOULDES: It may be, but for the life of me I can't forget that once——

LADY FREDERICK: [*Interrupting.*] My dear friend, don't rake up my lamentable past.

FOULDES: I don't think I've met any one so entirely devoid of sentiment as you are.

LADY FREDERICK: Let us agree that I have every vice under the sun and have done with it.

[*A SERVANT comes in.*]

SERVANT: Madame Claude wishes to see your ladyship.

LADY FREDERICK: Oh, my dressmaker.

FOULDES: Another bill?

LADY FREDERICK: That's the worst of Monte. One meets as many creditors as in Bond Street. Say I'm engaged.

SERVANT: Madame Claude says she will wait till miladi is free.

FOULDES: You make a mistake. One should always be polite to people whose bills one can't pay.

LADY FREDERICK: Show her in.

SERVANT: Yes, miladi.

[Exit SERVANT.]

FOULDES: Is it a big one?

LADY FREDERICK: Oh, no; only seven hundred pounds.

FOULDES: By Jove.

LADY FREDERICK: My dear friend, one must dress. I can't go about in fig-leaves.

FOULDES: One can dress simply.

LADY FREDERICK: I do. That's why it costs so much.

FOULDES: You know, you're devilish extravagant.

LADY FREDERICK: I'm not. I'm content with the barest necessities of existence.

FOULDES: You've got a maid.

LADY FREDERICK: Of course I've got a maid. I was never taught to dress myself.

FOULDES: And you've got a footman.

LADY FREDERICK: I've always had a footman. And my mother always had a footman. I couldn't live a day without him.

FOULDES: What does he do for you?

LADY FREDERICK: He inspires confidence in tradesmen.

FOULDES: And you have the most expensive suite of rooms in the hotel.

LADY FREDERICK: I'm in such a dreadful mess. If I hadn't got nice rooms I should brood over it.

FOULDES: Then, as if that weren't enough, you fling your money away at the tables.

LADY FREDERICK: When you're as poor as I am, a few louis more or less can make absolutely no difference.

FOULDES: [*With a laugh.*] You're quite incorrigible.

LADY FREDERICK: It's really not my fault. I do try to be economical, but money slips through my fingers like water. I can't help it.

FOULDES: You want a sensible sort of a man to look after you.

LADY FREDERICK: I want a very rich sort of a man to look after me.

FOULDES: If you were my wife, I should advertise in the papers that I wasn't responsible for your debts.

LADY FREDERICK: If you were my husband, I'd advertise immediately underneath that I wasn't responsible for your manners.

FOULDES: I wonder why you're so reckless.

LADY FREDERICK: When my husband was alive I was so utterly wretched. And afterwards, when I looked forward to a little happiness my boy died. Then I didn't care any more. I did everything I could to stupefy myself. I squandered money as other women take morphia—that's all.

FOULDES: It's the same dear scatter-brained, good-hearted Betsy that I used to know.

LADY FREDERICK: You're the only person who calls me Betsy now. To all the others I'm only Elizabeth.

FOULDES: Look here, what are you going to do with this dressmaker?

LADY FREDERICK: I don't know. I always trust to the inspiration of the moment.

FOULDES: She'll make a devil of a fuss, won't she?

LADY FREDERICK: Oh, no; I shall be quite nice to her.

FOULDES: I daresay. But won't she be very disagreeable to you?

LADY FREDERICK: You don't know what a way I have with my creditors.

FOULDES: I know it's not a paying way.

LADY FREDERICK: Isn't it? I bet you a hundred louis that I offer her the money and she refuses it.

FOULDES: I'll take that.

LADY FREDERICK: Here she is.

[MADAME CLAUDE enters, ushered in by the SERVANT.
*She is a stout, genteel person, very splendidly gowned,
with a Cockney accent. Her face is set to sternness,
decision to make a scene, and general sourness.*

SERVANT: Madame Claude.

[Exit SERVANT. LADY FREDERICK goes up to her
enthusiastically and takes both her hands.

LADY FREDERICK: Best of women. This is a joyful surprise.

MADAME CLAUDE: [*Drawing herself up.*] I 'eard quite by chance that your ladyship was at Monte.

LADY FREDERICK: So you came to see me at once. That was nice of you. You're the very person I wanted to see.

MADAME CLAUDE: [*Significantly.*] I'm glad of that, my lady, I must confess.

LADY FREDERICK: You dear creature. That's one advantage of Monte Carlo, one meets all one's friends. Do you know Mr. Fouldes? This is Madame Claude, an artist, my dear Paradine, a real artist.

MADAME CLAUDE: [*Grimly.*] I'm pleased that your ladyship should think so.

FOULDES: How d'you do.

LADY FREDERICK: Now, this gown. Look, look, look. In this skirt there's genius, *mon cher*. In the way it hangs my whole character is expressed. Observe the fullness of it, that indicates those admirable virtues which make me an ornament to Society, while the frill at the bottom just suggests those foibles—you can hardly call them faults—

which add a certain grace and interest to my personality. And the flounce. Paradine, I beseech you to look at it carefully. I would sooner have designed this flounce than won the Battle of Waterloo.

MADAME CLAUDE: Your ladyship is very kind.

LADY FREDERICK: Not at all, not at all. You remember that rose chiffon. I wore it the other day, and the dear Archduchess came up to me and said: "My dear, my dear." I thought she was going to have a fit. But when she recovered she kissed me on both cheeks and said: "Lady Frederick, you have a dressmaker worth her weight in gold." You heard her, Paradine, didn't you?

FOULDES: You forget that I only arrived last night.

LADY FREDERICK: Of course. How stupid of me. She'll be perfectly delighted to hear that you're in Monte Carlo. But I shall have to break it to her gently.

MADAME CLAUDE: [*Unmoved.*] I'm sorry to intrude upon your ladyship.

LADY FREDERICK: Now what are you talking about? If you hadn't come to see me I should never have forgiven you.

MADAME CLAUDE: I wanted to have a little talk with your ladyship.

LADY FREDERICK: Oh, but I hope we shall have many little talks. We must go out some drives together. I hope you're going to stay some time.

MADAME CLAUDE: That depends on circumstances, Lady Frederick. I've a little business to do here.

LADY FREDERICK: Then let me give you one warning—don't gamble.

MADAME CLAUDE: Oh, no, my lady. I gamble quite enough in my business as it is. I never know when my customers will pay their bills—if ever.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Slightly taken aback.*] Ha, ha, ha.

FOULDES: [*With a deep guffaw.*] Ho, ho, ho.

LADY FREDERICK: Isn't she clever? I must tell that to the Archduchess. She'll be so amused. Ha, ha, ha, ha. The dear Archduchess, you know she loves a little joke. You must really meet her. Will you come and lunch? I know you'd hit it off together.

MADAME CLAUDE: [*More genially.*] That's very kind of your ladyship.

LADY FREDERICK: My dear, you know perfectly well that I've always looked upon you as one of my best friends. Now who shall we have? There's you and me and the Archduchess. Then I'll ask Lord Mereston.

MADAME CLAUDE: The Marquess of Mereston, Lady Frederick?

LADY FREDERICK: Yes. And Mr. Fouldes, his uncle.

MADAME CLAUDE: Excuse me, are you the Mr. Paradine Fouldes?

FOULDES: [*Bowing.*] At your service, madam.

MADAME CLAUDE: I'm so glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Fouldes. [*Unctuously.*] I've always heard you're such a bad man.

FOULDES: Madam, you overwhelm me with confusion.

MADAME CLAUDE: Believe me, Mr. Fouldes, it's not the ladies that are married to saints who take the trouble to dress well.

LADY FREDERICK: Now we want a third man. Shall we ask my brother—you know Sir Gerald O'Mara, don't you? Or shall we ask Prince Doniani? Yes, I think we'll ask the Prince. I'm sure you'd like him. Such a handsome man! That'll make six.

MADAME CLAUDE: It's very kind of you, Lady Frederick, but—well, I'm only a tradeswoman, you know.

LADY FREDERICK: A tradeswoman? How can you talk such

nonsense. You are an artist—a real artist, my dear. And an artist is fit to meet a king.

MADAME CLAUDE: Well, I don't deny that I'd be ashamed to dress my customers in the gowns I see painted at the Royal Academy.

LADY FREDERICK: Then it's quite settled, isn't it, Madame Claude—oh, may I call you Ada?

MADAME CLAUDE: Oh, Lady Frederick, I should be very much flattered. But how did you know that was my name?

LADY FREDERICK: Why you wrote me a letter only the other day.

MADAME CLAUDE: Did I?

LADY FREDERICK: And such a cross letter too.

MADAME CLAUDE: [*Apologetically.*] Oh, but Lady Frederick, that was only in the way of business. I don't exactly remember what expressions I may have made use of—

LADY FREDERICK: [*Interrupting, as if the truth had suddenly flashed across her.*] Ada! I do believe you came here to-day about my account.

MADAME CLAUDE: Oh, no, my lady, I promise you.

LADY FREDERICK: You did; I know you did. I see it in your face. Now that really wasn't nice of you. I thought you came as a friend.

MADAME CLAUDE: I did, Lady Frederick.

LADY FREDERICK: No, you wanted to dun me. I'm disappointed in you. I did think, after all the things I've had from you, you wouldn't treat me like that.

MADAME CLAUDE: But I assure your ladyship. . . .

LADY FREDERICK: Not another word. You came to ask for a cheque. You shall have it.

MADAME CLAUDE: No, Lady Frederick, I wouldn't take it. .

LADY FREDERICK: What is the exact figure, Madame Claude?

MADAME CLAUDE: I—I don't remember.

LADY FREDERICK: Seven hundred and fifty pounds, seventeen and ninepence. You see, I remember. You came for your cheque and you shall have it.

[She sits down and takes a pen.]

MADAME CLAUDE: Now, Lady Frederick, I should look upon that as most unkind. It's treating me like a very second-rate establishment.

LADY FREDERICK: I'm sorry, but you should have thought of that before. Now I haven't got a cheque; how tiresome.

MADAME CLAUDE: Oh, it doesn't matter, Lady Frederick. I promise you it never entered my 'ead.

LADY FREDERICK: What shall I do?

FOULDES: You can write it on a sheet of paper, you know.

LADY FREDERICK: *[With a look, aside to him.]* Monster! *[Aloud.]* Of course I can. I hadn't thought of that. *[She takes a sheet of paper.]* But how on earth am I to get a stamp?

FOULDES: *[Much amused.]* I happen to have one on me.

LADY FREDERICK: I wonder why on earth you should have English stamps in Monte Carlo?

FOULDES: *[Handing her one.]* A penny stamp may sometimes save one a hundred louis.

LADY FREDERICK: *[Ironically.]* Thanks so much. I write the name of my bank on the top, don't I? Pay Madame Claude. . . .

MADAME CLAUDE: Now it's no good, Lady Frederick, I won't take it. After all I 'ave my self-respect to think of.

LADY FREDERICK: It's too late now.

MADAME CLAUDE: *[Sniffing a little.]* No, no, Lady Frederick. Don't be too 'ard on me. As one lady to another I ask you to forgive me. I did come about my account, but—well, I don't want the money.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Looking up good-humouredly.*] Well, well.
[*She looks at the cheque.*] It shall be as you wish. 'There.
[*She tears it up.*]

MADAME CLAUDE: Oh, thank you, Lady Frederick. I look upon that as a real favour. And now I really must be getting off.

LADY FREDERICK: Must you go? Well, good-bye. Paradine, take Madame Claude to her carriage. Adal!

[*She kisses her on the cheek.*]

MADAME CLAUDE: [*Going.*] I am pleased to have seen you.

[*PARADINE offers his arm and goes out with MADAME CLAUDE. LADY FREDERICK goes to the window, stands on a chair and waves her handkerchief. While she is doing this CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE enters.*]

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: How d'you do?

LADY FREDERICK: [*Getting down.*] How nice of you to come. I wanted to see you.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: May I sit down?

LADY FREDERICK: Of course. There are one or two things I'd like to talk to you about.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: Yes?

LADY FREDERICK: First I must thank you for your great kindness to Gerald. I didn't know last night that he owed you a good deal of money.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: It's a mere trifle.

LADY FREDERICK: You must be very rich to call nine hundred pounds that?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: I am.

LADY FREDERICK: [*With a laugh.*] All the same it's extremely good of you to give him plenty of time.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: I told Gerald he could have till to-morrow.

LADY FREDERICK: Obviously he wants to settle with you as soon as ever he can.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: [*Quietly.*] I often wonder why gambling debts are known as debts of honour.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Looking at him steadily.*] Of course I realise that if you choose to press for the money and Gerald can't pay—he'll have to send in his papers.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: [*Lightly.*] You may be quite sure I have no wish to bring about such a calamity. By the way, have you thought over our little talk of last night?

LADY FREDERICK: No.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: You would have been wise to do so.

LADY FREDERICK: My dear Captain Montgomerie, you really can't expect me to marry you because my brother has been so foolish as to lose more money at poker than he can afford.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: Did you ever hear that my father was a money-lender?

LADY FREDERICK: A lucrative profession, I believe.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: He found it so. He was a Polish Jew called Aaron Levitzki. He came to this country with three shillings in his pocket. He lent half-a-crown of it to a friend on the condition that he should be paid back seven and six in three days.

LADY FREDERICK: I'm not good at figures, but the interest sounds rather high.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: It is. That was one of my father's specialities. From these humble beginnings his business grew to such proportions that at his death he was able to leave me the name and arms of the great family of Montgomerie and something over a million of money.

LADY FREDERICK: The result of thrift, industry, and good fortune.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: My father was able to gratify all his ambitions but one. He was eaten up with the desire to move in good society, and this he was never able to achieve. His dying wish was that I should live in those circles which he knew only . . .

LADY FREDERICK: Across the counter?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: Precisely. But my poor father was a little ignorant in these matters. To him one lord was as good as another. He thought a Marquess a finer man than an Earl, and a Viscount than a Baron. He would never have understood that a penniless Irish baronet might go into better society than many a belted earl.

LADY FREDERICK: And what is the application of this?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: I wanted to explain to you one of the reasons which emboldened me last night to make you a proposal of marriage.

LADY FREDERICK: But surely you know some very nice people. I saw you lunching the other day with the widow of a city knight.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: Many very excellent persons are glad to have me to dine with them. But I know quite well that they're not the real article. I'm as far off as ever from getting into those houses which you have been used to all your life. I'm not content with third-rate earls and rather seedy dowagers.

LADY FREDERICK: Forgive my frankness, but—aren't you rather a snob?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: My father, Aaron Levitzki, married an English woman, and I have all the English virtues.

LADY FREDERICK: But I'm not quite sure that people would swallow you even as my husband.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: They'd make a face, but they'd swallow me right enough. And when I asked them down

to the best shoot in England they'd come to the conclusion that I agreed with them very well.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Still rather amused.*] Your offer is eminently businesslike, but you see I'm not a business woman. It doesn't appeal to me.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: I only ask you to perform such of the duties of a wife as are required by Society. They are few enough in all conscience. I should wish you to entertain largely and receive my guests, be polite to me, at least in public, and go with me to the various places people go to. Otherwise I leave you entire freedom. You will find me generous and heedful to all your wishes.

LADY FREDERICK: Captain Montgomerie, I don't know how much of all that you have said is meant seriously. But, surely you're not choosing the right time to make such a proposal when my brother owes you so much money that if you care to be hard you can ruin him.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: Why not?

LADY FREDERICK: D'you mean to say . . . ?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: I will be quite frank with you. I should never have allowed Gerald to lose so much money which there was no likelihood of his being able to pay, if I had not thought it earned me some claim upon your gratitude.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Shortly.*] Gerald will pay every penny he owes you to-morrow.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: [*Blandly.*] Where d'you suppose he'll get it?

LADY FREDERICK: I have no doubt I shall be able to manage something.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: Have you not tried this morning, entirely without success?

LADY FREDERICK: [*Startled.*] What?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: You do not forget that you have

sundry moneys of your own which are payable to-morrow?

LADY FREDERICK: How d'you know that?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: I told you that when I took a thing in hand I carried it through. You went to Dick Cohen, and he told you he'd parted with the bills. Didn't you guess that only one man could have the least interest in taking them over?

LADY FREDERICK: You?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: Yes.

LADY FREDERICK: Oh, God.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: Come, come, don't be worried over it. There's nothing to be alarmed about. I'm a very decent chap—if you'd accepted me right away you would never have known that those bills were in my possession. Think it over once more. I'm sure we should get on well together. I can give you what you most need, money and the liberty to fling it away as recklessly as you choose; you can give me the assured and fixed position on which—my father's heart was set.

LADY FREDERICK: And if I don't accept, you'll make me a bankrupt and you'll ruin Gerald?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: I refuse to consider that very unpleasant alternative.

LADY FREDERICK: Oh! I can't, I can't.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: [*Laughing.*] But you must, you must. When shall I come for your answer? To-morrow? I'll come with the bills and Gerald's I.O.U. in my pocket, and you shall burn them yourself. Good-bye.

[*He kisses her hand and goes out.* LADY FREDERICK remains staring in front of her. MERESTON enters, followed by LADY MERESTON and PARADINE.

MERESTON: [*Going to her eagerly.*] Hullo! I wondered what on earth had become of you.

LADY FREDERICK: [*With a laugh.*] It's only two hours since I chased you away from me.

MERESTON: I'm afraid I bore you to death.

LADY FREDERICK: Don't be so silly. You know you don't.

MERESTON: Where are you going now?

LADY FREDERICK: I have rather a headache. I'm going to lie down.

MERESTON: I'm so sorry.

[*LADY FREDERICK goes out. MERESTON stares after her anxiously, and makes a step towards the door.*

LADY MERESTON: [*Sharply.*] Where are you going, Charlie?

MERESTON: I never asked Lady Frederick if I could do anything.

LADY MERESTON: Good heavens, there are surely plenty of servants in the hotel to get her anything she wants.

MERESTON: Don't you think a drive would do her good?

LADY MERESTON: [*Unable to control herself.*] Oh, I have no patience with you. I never saw such a ridiculous infatuation in my life.

PARADINE: Steady, old girl, steady.

MERESTON: What on earth d'you mean, mother?

LADY MERESTON: Presumably you're not going to deny that you're in love with that woman.

MERESTON: [*Growing pale.*] Would you mind speaking of her as Lady Frederick?

LADY MERESTON: You try me very much, Charlie. Please answer my question.

MERESTON: I don't want to seem unkind to you, mother, but I think you have no right to ask about my private affairs.

FOULDES: If you're going to talk this matter over you're more likely to come to an understanding if you both keep your tempers.

MERESTON: There's nothing I wish to discuss.

LADY MERESTON: Don't be absurd, Charlie. You're with Lady Frederick morning, noon and night. She can never stir a yard from the hotel but you go flying after. You pester her with your ridiculous attentions.

FOULDES: [*Blandly.*] One's relations have always such an engaging frankness. Like a bad looking-glass, they always represent you with a crooked nose and a cast in your eye.

LADY MERESTON: [*To MERESTON.*] I have certainly a right to know what you mean by all this and what is going to come of it.

MERESTON: I don't know what will come of it.

FOULDES: The question that excites our curiosity is this: are you going to ask Lady Frederick to marry you?

MERESTON: I refuse to answer that. It seems to me excessively impertinent.

FOULDES: Come, come, my boy, you're too young to play the heavy father. We're both your friends. Hadn't you better make a clean breast of it? After all, your mother and I are interested in nothing so much as your welfare.

LADY MERESTON: [*Imploring.*] Charlie!

MERESTON: Of course I'd ask her to marry me if I thought for a moment that she'd accept. But I'm so terrified that she'll refuse, and then perhaps I shall never see her again.

LADY MERESTON: The boy's stark, staring mad.

MERESTON: I don't know what I should do if she sent me about my business. I'd rather continue in this awful uncertainty than lose all hope for ever.

FOULDES: By George. You're pretty far gone, my son. The lover who's diffident is in a much worse way than the lover who protests.

LADY MERESTON: [*With a little laugh.*] I must say it amuses me that Lady Frederick should have had both my brother and my son dangling at her skirts. Your respective passions are separated by quite a number of years.

MERESTON: Lady Frederick has already told me of that incident.

FOULDES: With the usual indiscretion of her sex.

MERESTON: It appears that she was very unhappy and you, with questionable taste, made love to her.

FOULDES: Do your best not to preach at me, dear boy. It reminds me of your lamented father.

MERESTON: And at last she promised to go away with you. You were to meet at Waterloo Station.

FOULDES: Such a draughty place for an assignation.

MERESTON: Your train was to start at nine, and you were going to take the boat over to the Channel Isles.

FOULDES: Lady Frederick has a very remarkable memory. I remember hoping the sea wouldn't be rough.

MERESTON: And just as the train was starting her eye fell on the clock. At that moment her child was coming down to breakfast and would ask for her. Before you could stop her she'd jumped out of the carriage. The train was moving, and you couldn't get out, so you were taken on to Weymouth—alone.

LADY MERESTON: You must have felt a quite egregious ass, Paradine.

FOULDES: I did, but you need not rub it in.

LADY MERESTON: Doesn't it occur to you, Charlie, that a woman who loves so easily can't be very worthy of your affection?

MERESTON: But, my dear mother, d'you think she cared for my uncle?

FOULDES: What the dickens d'you mean?

MERESTON: D'you suppose if she loved you she would have hesitated to come? D'you know her so little as that? She thought of her child only because she was quite indifferent to you.

FOULDES: [*Crossly.*] You know nothing about it, and you're an impertinent young jackanapes.

LADY MERESTON: My dear Paradine, what can it matter if Lady Frederick was in love with you or not?

FOULDES: [*Calming down.*] Of course it doesn't matter a bit.

LADY MERESTON: I have no doubt you mistook wounded vanity for a broken heart.

FOULDES: [*Acidly.*] My dear, you sometimes say things which explain to me why my brother-in-law so frequently abandoned his own fireside for the platform of Exeter Hall.

MERESTON: It may also interest you to learn that I am perfectly aware of Lady Frederick's financial difficulties. I know she has two bills falling due to-morrow.

FOULDES: She's a very clever woman.

MERESTON: I've implored her to let me lend her the money, and she absolutely refuses. You see, she's kept nothing from me at all.

LADY MERESTON: My dear Charlie, it's a very old dodge to confess what doesn't matter in order to conceal what does.

MERESTON: What do you mean, mother?

LADY MERESTON: Lady Fredcrick has told you nothing of the Bellingham affair?

MERESTON: Why should she?

LADY MERESTON: It is surely expedient you should know that the woman you have some idea of marrying escaped the divorce court only by the skin of her teeth.

MERESTON: I don't believe that, mother.

FOULDES: Remember that you're talking to your respected parent, my boy.

MERESTON: I'm sorry that my mother should utter base and contemptible libels on—my greatest friend.

LADY MERESTON: You may be quite sure that I say nothing which I can't prove.

MERESTON: I won't listen to anything against Lady Frederick.

LADY MERESTON: But you must.

MERESTON: Are you quite indifferent to the great pain you cause me?

LADY MERESTON: I can't allow you to marry a woman who's hopelessly immoral.

MERESTON: Mother, how dare you say that?

FOULDES: This isn't the sort of thing I much like, but hadn't you better hear the worst at once?

MERESTON: Very well. But if my mother insists on saying things, she must say them in Lady Frederick's presence.

LADY MERESTON: That I'm quite willing to do.

MERESTON: Good.

[He rings a bell. A servant enters.]

FOULDES: You'd better take care, Maudie. Lady Frederick's a dangerous woman to play the fool with.

MERESTON: *[To the servant.]* Go to Lady Frederick Berolles and say Lord Mereston is extremely sorry to trouble her ladyship, but would be very much obliged if she'd come to the drawing-room for two minutes.

SERVANT: Very well, my lord. *[Exit.]*

FOULDES: What are you going to do, Maud?

LADY MERESTON: I knew there was a letter in existence in Lady Frederick's handwriting which proved all I've said about her. I've moved heaven and earth to get hold of it, and it came this morning.

FOULDES: Don't be such a fool. You're not going to use that?

LADY MERESTON: I am indeed.

FOULDES: Your blood be upon your own head. Unless I'm vastly mistaken you'll suffer the greatest humiliation that you can imagine.

LADY MERESTON: That's absurd. I have nothing to fear.

[LADY FREDERICK *comes in*.

MERESTON: I'm so sorry to disturb you. I hope you don't mind?

LADY FREDERICK: Not at all. I knew you wouldn't have sent for me in that fashion without good cause.

MERESTON: I'm afraid you'll think me dreadfully impatient.

LADY MERESTON: Really you need not apologise so much, Charlie.

MERESTON: My mother has something to say against you, and I think it right that she should say it in your presence.

LADY FREDERICK: That's very nice of you, Charlie—though I confess I prefer people to say horrid things of me only behind my back. Especially if they're true.

FOULDES: Look here, I think all this is rather nonsense. We've most of us got something in our past history that we don't want raked up, and we'd all better let bygones be bygones.

LADY FREDERICK: I'm waiting, Lady Mereston.

LADY MERESTON: It's merely that I thought my son should know that Lady Frederick had been the mistress of Roger Bellingham. [LADY FREDERICK *turns quickly and looks at her; then bursts into a peal of laughter*. LADY MERESTON *springs up angrily and hands her a letter*.] Is this in your handwriting?

LADY FREDERICK: [*Not at all disconcerted.*] Dear me, how did you get hold of this?

LADY MERESTON: You see that I have ample proof, Lady Frederick.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Handing the letter to MERESTON.*] Would you like to read it? You know my writing well enough to be able to answer Lady Mereston's question.

[*He reads it through and looks at her in dismay.*]

MERESTON: Good God! . . . What does it mean?

LADY FREDERICK: Pray read it aloud.

MERESTON: I can't.

LADY FREDERICK: Then give it to me. [*She takes it from him.*]

It's addressed to my brother-in-law, Peter Berolles. The Kate to whom it refers was his wife. [*Reads.*] Dear Peter: I'm sorry you should have had a row with Kate about Roger Bellingham. You are quite wrong in all you thought. There is absolutely nothing between them. I don't know where Kate was on Tuesday night, but certainly she was not within a hundred miles of Roger. This I know because. . . .

MERESTON: [*Interrupting.*] For God's sake don't go on.

[*LADY FREDERICK looks at him and shrugs her shoulders.*]

LADY FREDERICK: It's signed Elizabeth Berolles. And there's a postscript: You may make what use of this letter you like.

MERESTON: What does it mean? What does it mean?

LADY MERESTON: Surely it's very clear? You can't want a more explicit confession of guilt.

LADY FREDERICK: I tried to make it as explicit as possible.

MERESTON: Won't you say something? I'm sure there must be some explanation.

LADY FREDERICK: I don't know how you got hold of this letter, Lady Mereston. I agree with you, it is com-

promising. But Kate and Peter are dead now, and there's nothing to prevent me from telling the truth.

[PARADINE FOULDES takes a step forward and watches her.]

LADY FREDERICK: My sister-in-law was a meek and mild little person, as demure as you can imagine, and no one would have suspected her for a moment of kicking over the traces. Well, one morning she came to me in floods of tears and confessed that she and Roger Bellingham [with a shrug] had been foolish. Her husband suspected that something was wrong and had kicked up a row.

FOULDES: [Drily.] There are men who will make a scene on the smallest provocation.

LADY FREDERICK: To shield herself she told the first lie that came into her head. She said to Peter that Roger Bellingham was my lover—and she threw herself on my mercy. She was a poor, weak little creature, and if there'd been a scandal she'd have gone to the dogs altogether. It had only been a momentary infatuation for Roger, and the scare had cured her. At the bottom of her heart she loved her husband still. I was desperately unhappy, and I didn't care much what became of me. She promised to turn over a new leaf and all that sort of thing. I thought I'd better give her another chance of going straight. I did what she wanted. I wrote that letter taking all the blame on myself, and Kate lived happily with her husband till she died.

MERESTON: It was just like you.

LADY MERESTON: But Lord and Lady Peter are dead?

LADY FREDERICK: Yes.

LADY MERESTON: And Roger Bellingham?

LADY FREDERICK: He's dead too.

LADY MERESTON: Then how can you prove your account of this affair?

LADY FREDERICK: I can't.

LADY MERESTON: And does this convince you, Charlie?

MERESTON: Of course.

LADY MERESTON: [*Impatiently.*] Good heavens, the boy's out of his senses. Paradine, for Heaven's sake say something.

FOULDES: Well, much as it may displease you, my dear, I'm afraid I agree with Charlie.

LADY MERESTON: You don't mean to say you believe this cock-and-bull story?

FOULDES: I do.

LADY MERESTON: Why?

FOULDES: Well, you see, Lady Frederick's a very clever woman. She would never have invented such an utterly improbable tale, which can't possibly be proved. If she'd been guilty, she'd have had ready at least a dozen proofs of her innocence.

LADY MERESTON: But that's absurd.

FOULDES: Besides, I've known Lady Frederick a long time, and she has at least a thousand faults.

LADY FREDERICK: [*With flashing eyes.*] Thanks.

FOULDES: But there's something I will say for her. She's not a liar. If she tells me a thing, I don't hesitate for a moment to believe it.

LADY FREDERICK: It's not a matter of the smallest importance if any of you believe me or not. Be so good as to ring, Charlie.

MERESTON: Certainly.

[*He rings, and a SERVANT immediately comes in.*]

LADY FREDERICK: Tell my servant that he's to come here at once and bring the despatch-box which is in my dressing-room.

SERVANT: Yes, miladi.

[*Exit.*]

FOULDES: [*Quickly.*] I say, what are you going to do?

LADY FREDERICK: That is absolutely no business of yours.

FOULDES: Be a brick, Betsy, and don't give her those letters.

LADY FREDERICK: I think I've had enough of this business.

I'm proposing to finish with it.

FOULDES: Temper, temper.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Stamping her foot.*] Don't say temper to me, Paradine.

[*She walks up and down angrily. PARADINE sits at the piano and with one finger strums "Rule Britannia."*]

MERESTON: Shut up.

[*He takes a book, flings it at his head and misses.*]

FOULDES: Good shot, sir.

LADY FREDERICK: I often wonder how you got your reputation for wit, Paradine.

FOULDES: By making a point of laughing heartily at other people's jokes.

[*The FOOTMAN enters with the despatch-box, which LADY FREDERICK opens. She takes a bundle of letters from it.*]

FOULDES: Betsy, Betsy, for heaven's sake don't! Have mercy.

LADY FREDERICK: Was mercy shown to me? Albert!

FOOTMAN: Yes, miladi.

LADY FREDERICK: You'll go to the proprietor of the hotel and tell him that I propose to leave Monte Carlo to-morrow.

MERESTON: [*Aghast.*] Are you going?

FOOTMAN: Very well, my lady.

LADY FREDERICK: Have you a good memory for faces?

FOOTMAN: Yes, my lady.

LADY FREDERICK: You're not likely to forget Lord Mereston?

FOOTMAN: No, my lady.

LADY FREDERICK: Then please take note that if his lordship calls upon me in London I'm not at home.

MERESTON: Lady Frederick!

LADY FREDERICK: [*To FOOTMAN.*] Go.

[*Exit FOOTMAN.*]

MERESTON: What d'you mean? What have I done?

[*Without answering LADY FREDERICK takes the letters. PARADINE is watching her anxiously. She goes up to the fire and throws them in one by one.*]

LADY MERESTON: What on earth is she doing?

LADY FREDERICK: I have some letters here which would ruin the happiness of a very worthless woman I know. I'm burning them so that I may never have the temptation to use them.

FOULDES: I never saw anything so melodramatic.

LADY FREDERICK: Hold your tongue, Paradine. [*Turning to MERESTON.*] My dear Charlie, I came to Monte Carlo to be amused. Your mother has persecuted me incessantly. Your uncle—is too well-bred to talk to his servants as he has talked to me. I've been pestered in one way and another, and insulted till my blood boiled, because apparently they're afraid you may want to marry me. I'm sick and tired of it. I'm not used to treatment of this sort; my patience is quite exhausted. And since you are the cause of the whole thing I have an obvious remedy. I would much rather not have anything more to do with you. If we meet one another in the street you need not trouble to look my way because I shall cut you dead.

LADY MERESTON: [*In an undertone.*] Thank God for that.

MERESTON: Mother, mother. [*To LADY FREDERICK.*] I'm awfully sorry. I feel that you have a right to be angry. For all that you've suffered I beg your pardon most

humbly. My mother has said and done things which I regret to say are quite unjustifiable.

LADY MERESTON: Charlie!

MERESTON: On her behalf and on mine I apologise with all my heart.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Smiling.*] Don't take it too seriously. It really doesn't matter. But I think it's far wiser that we shouldn't see one another again.

MERESTON: But I can't live without you.

LADY MERESTON: [*With a gasp.*] Ah!

MERESTON: Don't you know that my whole happiness is wrapped up in you? I love you with all my heart and soul. I can never love anyone but you.

FOULDES: [*To LADY MERESTON.*] Now you've done it. You've done it very neatly.

MERESTON: Don't think me a presumptuous fool. I've been wanting to say this ever since I knew you, but I haven't dared. You're brilliant and charming and fascinating, but I have nothing whatever to offer you.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Gently.*] My dear Charlie.

MERESTON: But if you can overlook my faults, I daresay you could make something of me. Won't you marry me? I should look upon it as a great honour, and I would love you always to the end of my life. I'd try to be worthy of my great happiness and you.

LADY FREDERICK: You're very much too modest, Charlie. I'm enormously flattered and grateful. You must give me time to think it over.

LADY MERESTON: Time?

MERESTON: But I can't wait. Don't you see how I love you? You'll never meet anyone who'll care for you as I do.

LADY FREDERICK: I think you can wait a little. Come and see me to-morrow morning at ten, and I'll give you an answer.

MERESTON: Very well, if I must.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Smiling.*] I'm afraid so.

FOULDES: [*To LADY FREDERICK.*] I wonder what the deuce your little game is now.

[She smiles triumphantly and gives him a deep, ironical curtsey.]

LADY FREDERICK: Sir, your much obliged and very obedient, humble servant.

END OF THE SECOND ACT

THE THIRD ACT

SCENE: LADY FREDERICK'S dressing-room. *At the back is a large opening, curtained, which leads to the bedroom; on the right a door leading to the passage; on the left a window. In front of the window, of which the blind is drawn, is a dressing-table. LADY FREDERICK'S maid is in the room, a very neat pretty Frenchwoman. She speaks with a slight accent. She rings the bell, and the FOOTMAN enters.*

MAID: As soon as Lord Mereston arrives he is to be shown in.

FOOTMAN: [*Surprised.*] Here?

MAID: Where else?

[The FOOTMAN winks significantly. The MAID draws herself up with dignity, and with a dramatic gesture points to the door.]

MAID: Depart.

[The FOOTMAN goes out.]

LADY FREDERICK: [*From the bedroom.*] Have you drawn the blind, Angélique?

MAID: I will do so, miladi. *[She draws the blind, and the light falls brightly on the dressing-table.]* But miladi will never be able to stand it. *[She looks at herself in the glass.]* Oh, the light of the sun in the morning! I cannot look at myself.

LADY FREDERICK: [*As before.*] There's no reason that you should—especially in my glass.

MAID: But if 'is lordship is coming, miladi must let me draw the blind. Oh, it is impossible.

LADY FREDERICK: Do as you're told and don't interfere.

[The FOOTMAN enters to announce MERESTON. The MAID goes out.]

FOOTMAN: Lord Mereston.

LADY FREDERICK: [*As before.*] Is that you, Charlie? You're very punctual.

MERESTON: I've been walking about outside till the clock struck.

LADY FREDERICK: I'm not nearly dressed, you know. I've only just had my bath.

MERESTON: Must I go?

LADY FREDERICK: No, of course not. You can talk to me while I'm finishing.

MERESTON: All right. How are you this morning?

LADY FREDERICK: I don't know. I haven't looked at myself in the glass yet. How are you?

MERESTON: A 1, thanks,

LADY FREDERICK: Are you looking nice?

MERESTON: [*Going to the glass.*] I hope so. By Jove, what a strong light. You must be pretty sure of your complexion to be able to stand that.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Appearing.*] I am.

MERESTON: [*Going forward eagerly.*] Ah.

[She comes through the curtains. She wears a kimono, her hair is all dishevelled, hanging about her head in a tangled mop. She is not made up and looks haggard and yellow and lined. When MERESTON sees her he gives a slight start of surprise. She plays the scene throughout with her broadest brogue.]

LADY FREDERICK: Good-morning.

MERESTON: [*Staring at her in dismay.*] Good-morning.

LADY FREDERICK: Well, what have you to say to me?

MERESTON: [*Embarrassed.*] I hope you slept all right.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Laughing.*] Did you?

MERESTON: I forget.

LADY FREDERICK: I believe you slept like a top, Charlie. You really might have lain awake and thought of me. What is the matter? You look as if you'd seen a ghost.

MERESTON: Oh no, not at all.

LADY FREDERICK: You're not disappointed already?

MERESTON: No, of course not. Only—you look so different with your hair not done.

LADY FREDERICK: [*With a little cry.*] Oh, I'd forgotten all about it. Angélique, come and do my hair.

MAID: [*Appearing.*] Yes, miladi.

[LADY FREDERICK sits down at the dressing-table.]

LADY FREDERICK: Now, take pains, Angélique. I want to look my very best. Angélique is a jewel of incalculable value.

MAID: Miladi is very kind.

LADY FREDERICK: If I'm light-hearted, she does it one way. If I'm depressed she does it another.

MAID: Oh, miladi, the perruquier who taught me said always that a good hairdresser could express every mood and every passion of the human heart.

LADY FREDERICK: Good heavens, you don't mean to say you can do all that?

MAID: Miladi, he said I was his best pupil.

LADY FREDERICK: Very well. Express—express a great crisis in my affairs.

MAID: That is the easiest thing in the world, miladi. I bring the hair rather low on the forehead, and that expresses a crisis in her ladyship's affairs.

LADY FREDERICK: But I always wear my hair low on the forehead.

MAID: Then it is plain her ladyship's affairs are always in a critical condition.

LADY FREDERICK: So they are. I never thought of that.

MERESTON: You've got awfully stunning hair, Lady Frederick.

LADY FREDERICK: D'you like it, really?

MERESTON: The colour's perfectly beautiful.

LADY FREDERICK: It ought to be. It's frightfully expensive.

MERESTON: You don't mean to say it's dyed?

LADY FREDERICK: Oh, no. Only touched up. That's quite a different thing.

MERESTON: Is it?

LADY FREDERICK: It's like superstition, you know, which is what other people believe. My friends dye their hair, but I only touch mine up. Unfortunately, it costs just as much.

MERESTON: And you have such a lot.

LADY FREDERICK: Oh, heaps. [*She opens a drawer and takes out a long switch.*] Give him a bit to look at.

MAID: Yes, miladi. [*She gives it to him.*]

MERESTON: Er—yes. [*Not knowing what on earth to say.*] How silky it is.

LADY FREDERICK: A poor thing, but mine own. At least, I paid for it. By the way, have I paid for it yet, Angélique?

MAID: Not yet, miladi. But the man can wait.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Taking it from MERESTON.*] A poor thing, then, but my hairdresser's. Shall I put it on?

MERESTON: I wouldn't, if I were you.

MAID: If her ladyship anticipates a tragic situation, I would venture to recommend it. A really pathetic scene is impossible without a quantity of hair worn quite high on the head.

LADY FREDERICK: Oh, I know. Whenever I want to soften the hard heart of a creditor I clap on every bit I've got. But I don't think I will to-day. I'll tell you what, a temple curl would just fit the case.

MAID: Then her ladyship inclines to comedy. Very well, I say no more.

[LADY FREDERICK *takes two temple-curls from the drawer.*

LADY FREDERICK: Aren't they dears?

MERESTON: Yes.

LADY FREDERICK: You've admired them very often, Charlic, haven't you? I suppose you never knew they cost a guinea each?

MERESTON: It never occurred to me they were false.

LADY FREDERICK: The masculine intelligence is so gross. Didn't your mother tell you?

MERESTON: My mother told me a great deal.

LADY FREDERICK: I expect she overdid it. There. Now that's done. D'you think it looks nice.

MERESTON: Charming.

LADY FREDERICK: Angélique, his lordship is satisfied. You may disappear.

MAID: Yes, miladi. [*She goes.*

LADY FREDERICK: Now, tell me you think I'm the most ravishing creature you ever saw in your life.

MERESTON: I've told you that so often.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Stretching out her hands.*] You are a nice boy. It was charming of you to say—what you did yesterday. I could have hugged you there and then.

MERESTON: Could you?

LADY FREDERICK: Oh, my dear, don't be so cold.

MERESTON: I'm very sorry, I didn't mean to be.

LADY FREDERICK: Haven't you got anything nice to say to me at all?

MERESTON: I don't know what I can say that I've not said a thousand times already.

LADY FREDERICK: Tell me what you thought of all night when you tossed on that sleepless pillow of yours.

MERESTON: I was awfully anxious to see you again.

LADY FREDERICK: Didn't you have a dreadful fear that I shouldn't be as nice as you imagined? Now, come—honestly.

MERESTON: Well, yes, I suppose it crossed my mind.

LADY FREDERICK: And am I?

MERESTON: Of course.

LADY FREDERICK: You're sure you're not disappointed?

MERESTON: Quite sure.

LADY FREDERICK: What a relief! You know, I've been tormenting myself dreadfully. I said to myself: He'll go on thinking of me till he imagines I'm the most beautiful woman in the world, and then, when he comes here and sees the plain reality, it'll be an awful blow.

MERESTON: What nonsense! How could you think anything of the kind?

LADY FREDERICK: Are you aware that you haven't shown the least desire to kiss me yet?

MERESTON: I thought—I thought you might not like it.

LADY FREDERICK: It'll be too late in a minute.

MERESTON: Why?

LADY FREDERICK: Because I'm just going to make up, you silly boy.

MERESTON: How? I don't understand.

LADY FREDERICK: You said I must be very sure of my complexion. Of course I am. Here it is.

[She runs her fingers over a row of little pots and vases.]

MERESTON: Oh, I see. I beg your pardon.

LADY FREDERICK: You don't mean to say you thought it natural?

MERESTON: It never occurred to me it might be anything else.

LADY FREDERICK: It's really too disheartening. I spend an hour every day of my life making the best complexion in Monte Carlo, and you think it's natural. Why, I might as well be a dairymaid of eighteen.

MERESTON: I'm very sorry.

LADY FREDERICK: I forgive you. . . . You may kiss my hand. [*He does so.*] You dear boy. [*Looking at herself in the glass.*] Oh, Betsy, you're not looking your best to-day. [*Shaking her finger at the glass.*] This won't do, Betsy, my dear. You're very nearly looking your age. [*Turning round quickly.*] D'you think I look forty?

MERESTON: I never asked myself how old you were.

LADY FREDERICK: Well, I'm not, you know. And I shan't be as long as there's a pot of rouge and a powder puff in the world. [*She rubs grease paint all over her face.*]

MERESTON: What *are* you doing?

LADY FREDERICK: I wish I were an actress. They have such an advantage. They only have to make up to look well behind the footlights; but I have to expose myself to that beastly sun.

MERESTON: [*Nervously.*] Yes, of course.

LADY FREDERICK: Is your mother dreadfully annoyed with you? And Paradine must be furious. I shall call him Uncle Paradine next time I see him. It'll make him feel so middle-aged. Charlie, you don't know how grateful I am for what you did yesterday. You acted like a real brick.

MERESTON: It's awfully good of you to say so.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Turning.*] Do I look a fright?

MERESTON: Oh, no, not at all.

LADY FREDERICK: I love this powder. It plays no tricks with you. Once I put on a new powder that I bought in

Paris, and as soon as I went into artificial light it turned a bright mauve. I was very much annoyed. You wouldn't like to go about with a mauve face, would you?

MERESTON: No, not at all.

LADY FREDERICK: Fortunately I had a green frock on. And mauve and green were very fashionable that year. Still I'd sooner it hadn't been on my face. . . . There. I think that'll do as a foundation. I'm beginning to feel younger already. Now for the delicate soft bloom of youth. The great difficulty, you know, is to make both your cheeks the same colour. [*Turning to him.*] Charlie, you're not bored, are you?

MERESTON: No, no.

LADY FREDERICK: I always think my observations have a peculiar piquancy when I have only one cheek rouged. I remember once I went out to dinner, and as soon as I sat down I grew conscious of the fact that one of my cheeks was much redder than the other.

MERESTON: By George, that was awkward.

LADY FREDERICK: Charlie, you are a good-looking boy. I had no idea you were so handsome. And you look so young and fresh, it's quite a pleasure to look at you.

MERESTON: [*Laughing awkwardly.*] D'you think so? What did you do when you discovered your predicament?

LADY FREDERICK: Well, by a merciful interposition of Providence, I had a foreign diplomatist on my right side which bloomed like a rose, and a bishop on my left which was white like the lily. The diplomatist told me risky stories all through dinner so it was quite natural that this cheek should blush fiery red. And as the Bishop whispered in my left ear harrowing details of distress in the East End, it was only decent that the other should exhibit a becoming pallor. [*Meanwhile she has been rouging her cheeks.*] Now look carefully, Charlie, and

you'll see how I make the Cupid's bow which is my mouth. I like a nice healthy colour on the lips, don't you?

MERESTON: Isn't it awfully uncomfortable to have all that stuff on?

LADY FREDERICK: Ah, my dear boy, it's woman's lot to suffer in this world. But it's a great comfort to think that one is submitting to the decrees of Providence and at the same time adding to one's personal attractiveness. But I confess I sometimes wish I needn't blow my nose so carefully. Smile, Charlie. I don't think you're a very ardent lover, you know.

MERESTON: I'm sorry. What would you like me to do?

LADY FREDERICK: I should like you to make me impassioned speeches.

MERESTON: I'm afraid they'd be so hackneyed.

LADY FREDERICK: Never mind that. I've long discovered that under the influence of profound emotion a man always expresses himself in the terms of the *Family Herald*.

MERESTON: You must remember that I'm awfully inexperienced.

LADY FREDERICK: Well, I'll let you off this time—because I like your curly hair. [*She sighs amorously.*] Now for the delicate arch of my eyebrows. I don't know what I should do without this. I've got no eyebrows at all really. . . . Have you ever noticed that dark line under the eyes which gives such intensity to my expression?

MERESTON: Yes, often.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Holding out the pencil.*] Well, here it is. Ah, my dear boy, in this pencil you have at will roguishness and languor, tenderness and indifference, sprightliness, passion, malice, what you will. Now be very quiet for one moment. If I overdo it my whole day will be

spoilt. You mustn't breathe even. Whenever I do this I think how true those lines are: The little more and how much it is. The little less and what worlds away. There! Now just one puff of powder, and the whole world's kind. [*Looking at herself in the glass and sighing with satisfaction.*] Ah! I feel eighteen. I think it's a success, and I shall have a happy day. Oh, Betsy, Betsy, I think you'll do. You know, you're not unattractive, my dear. Not strictly beautiful, perhaps; but then I don't like the chocolate-box sort of woman. I'll just go and take off this dressing-gown. [MERESTON *gets up.*] No, don't move. I'll go into my bedroom. I shall only be one moment. [LADY FREDERICK *goes through the curtains.*] Angélique.

[*The MAID enters.*]

MAID: Yes, miladi.

LADY FREDERICK: Just clear away those things on the dressing-table.

MAID: [*Doing so.*] Very well, miladi.

LADY FREDERICK: You may have a cigarette, Charlie.

MERESTON: Thanks. My nerves are a bit dicky this morning.

LADY FREDERICK: Oh, blow the thing! Angélique, come and help me.

MAID: Yes, miladi.

[*She goes out.*]

LADY FREDERICK: At last.

[*She comes in, having changed the kimono for a very beautiful dressing-gown of silk and lace.*]

LADY FREDERICK: Now, are you pleased?

MERESTON: Of course I'm pleased.

LADY FREDERICK: Then you may make love to me.

MERESTON: You say such disconcerting things.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Laughing.*] Well, Charlie, you've found no difficulty in doing it for the last fortnight. You're not going to pretend that you're already at a loss for pretty speeches?

MERESTON: When I came nere, I had a thousand things to say to you, but you've driven them all out of my head. Won't you give me an answer now?

LADY FREDERICK: What to?

MERESTON: You've not forgotten that I asked you to marry me?

LADY FREDERICK: No, but you asked me under very peculiar circumstances. I wonder if you can repeat the offer now in cold blood?

MERESTON: Of course. What a cad you must think me!

LADY FREDERICK: Are you sure you want to marry me still —after having slept over it?

MERESTON: Yes.

LADY FREDERICK: You are a good boy, and I'm a beast to treat you so abominably. It's awfully nice of you.

MERESTON: Well, what is the answer?

LADY FREDERICK: My dear, I've been giving it you for the last half-hour.

MERESTON: How?

LADY FREDERICK: You don't for a moment suppose I should have let you into those horrible mysteries of my toilette if I'd had any intention of marrying you? Give me credit for a certain amount of intelligence and good feeling. I should have kept up the illusion, at all events till after the honeymoon.

MERESTON: Are you going to refuse me?

LADY FREDERICK: Aren't you rather glad?

MERESTON: No, no, no.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Putting her arm through his.*] Now let us talk it over sensibly. You're a very nice boy, and I'm

awfully fond of you. But you're twenty-two, and heaven only knows my age. You see, the church in which I was baptized was burnt down the year I was born, so I don't know how old I am.

MERESTON: [*Smiling.*] Where was it burnt?

LADY FREDERICK: In Ireland.

MERESTON: I thought so.

LADY FREDERICK: Just at present I can make a decent enough show by taking infinite pains; and my hand is not so heavy that the innocent eyes of your sex can discover how much of me is due to art. But in ten years you'll only be thirty-two, and then, if I married you, my whole life would be a mortal struggle to preserve some semblance of youth. Haven't you seen those old hags who've never surrendered to Anno Domini, with their poor, thin, wrinkled cheeks covered with paint, and the dreadful wigs that hide a hairless pate? Rather cock-eyed, don't you know, and invariably flaxen. You've laughed at their ridiculous graces, and you've been disgusted too. Oh, I'm so sorry for them, poor things. And I should become just like that, for I should never have the courage to let my hair be white so long as yours was brown. But if I don't marry you, I can look forward to the white hairs fairly happily. The first I shall pluck out, and the second I shall pluck out. But when the third comes I'll give in, and I'll throw my rouge and my *poudre de riz* and my pencils into the fire.

MERESTON: But d'you think I should ever change?

LADY FREDERICK: My dear boy, I'm sure of it. Can't you imagine what it would be to be tied to a woman who was always bound to sit with her back to the light? And sometimes you might want to kiss me.

MERESTON: I think it very probable.

LADY FREDERICK: Well, you couldn't—in case you disarranged my complexion. [MERESTON *sighs deeply.*] Don't

sigh, Charlie. I daresay I was horrid to let you fall in love with me, but I'm only human, and I was desperately flattered.

MERESTON: Was that all?

LADY FREDERICK: And rather touched. That is why I want to give a cure with my refusal.

MERESTON: But you break my heart.

LADY FREDERICK: My dear, men have said that to me ever since I was fifteen, but I've never noticed that in consequence they ate their dinner less heartily.

MERESTON: I suppose you think it was only calf-love?

LADY FREDERICK: I'm not such a fool as to imagine a boy can love any less than a man. If I'd thought your affection ridiculous I shouldn't have been so flattered.

MERESTON: It doesn't hurt any the less because the wounds you make are clean cut.

LADY FREDERICK: But they'll soon heal. And you'll fall in love with a nice girl of your own age, whose cheeks flush with youth and not with rouge, and whose eyes sparkle because they love you, and not because they're carefully made up.

MERESTON: But I wanted to help you. You're in such an awful scrape, and if you'll only marry me it can all be set right.

LADY FREDERICK: Oh, my dear, don't go in for self-sacrifice. You must leave that to women. They're so much more used to it.

MERESTON: Isn't there anything I can do for you?

LADY FREDERICK: No, dear. I shall get out of the mess somehow. I always do. You really need not worry about me.

MERESTON: You *know*, you *are* a brick.

LADY FREDERICK: Then it's all settled, isn't it? And you're not going to be unhappy?

MERESTON: I'll try not to be.

LADY FREDERICK: I'd like to imprint a chaste kiss on your forehead, only I'm afraid it would leave a mark.

[*The FOOTMAN comes in and announces PARADINE FOULDES.*

FOOTMAN: Mr. Paradine FoulDES.

[*Exit.*

FOULDES: Do I disturb?

LADY FREDERICK: Not at all. We've just finished our conversation.

FOULDES: Well?

MERESTON: If anyone wants to know who the best woman in the world is send 'em to me, and I'll tell them.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Taking his hand.*] You dear! Good-bye.

MERESTON: Good-bye. And thanks for being so kind to me.
[*He goes out.*

FOULDES: Do I see in front of me my prospective niece?

LADY FREDERICK: Why d'you ask, Uncle Paradine?

FOULDES: Singularly enough because I want to know.

LADY FREDERICK: Well, it so happens—you don't.

FOULDES: You've refused him?

LADY FREDERICK: I have.

FOULDES: Then will you tell me why you've been leading us all such a 'devil of a dance?

LADY FREDERICK: Because you interfered with me, and I allow no one to do that.

FOULDES: Hoity-toity.

LADY FREDERICK: You weren't really so foolish as to imagine I should marry a boy who set me up on a pedestal and vowed he was unworthy to kiss the hem of my garment?

FOULDES: Why not?

LADY FREDERICK: My dear Paradine, I don't want to commit suicide by sheer boredom. There's only one thing in the world more insufferable than being in love.

FOULDES: And what is that, pray?

LADY FREDERICK: Why, having some one in love with you.

FOULDES: I've suffered from it all my life.

LADY FREDERICK: Think of living up to the ideal Charlie has of me. My hair would turn a hydrogen yellow in a week. And then to be so desperately adored as all that—oh, it's so dull! I should have to wear a mask all day long. I could never venture to be natural in case I shocked him. And notwithstanding all my efforts I should see the illusions tumbling about his ears one by one till he realised I was no ethereal goddess, but a very ordinary human woman neither better nor worse than anybody else.

FOULDES: Your maxim appears to be, marry anyone you like except the man that's in love with you.

LADY FREDERICK: Ah, but don't you think I might find a man who loved me though he knew me through and through? I'd far rather that he saw my faults and forgave them than that he thought me perfect.

FOULDES: But how d'you know you've choked the boy off for good?

LADY FREDERICK: I took good care. I wanted to cure him. If it had been possible I would have shown him my naked soul. But I couldn't do that, so I let him see. . . .

FOULDES: [*Interrupting.*] What!

LADY FREDERICK: [*Laughing.*] No, not quite. I had a dressing-gown on and other paraphernalia. But I made him come here when I wasn't made up, and he sat by while I rouged my cheeks.

FOULDES: And the young fool thought there was nothing more in you than a carefully prepared complexion?

LADY FREDERICK: He was very nice about it. But I think he was rather relieved when I refused him.

[*There is a knock at the door.*]

GERALD: [*Outside.*] May we come in?

LADY FREDERICK: Yes, do.

[*Enter GERALD and ROSE and the ADMIRAL.*]

GERALD: [*Excitedly.*] I say, it's all right. The Admiral's come down like a real brick. I've told him everything.

LADY FREDERICK: What do you mean? Good-morning, dear Admiral.

ADMIRAL: Good-morning.

GERALD: I've made a clean breast of it. I talked it over with Rosie.

ROSE: And we went to papa together.

GERALD: And told him that I owed Montgomerie nine hundred pounds.

ROSE: And we thought papa would make an awful scene.

GERALD: Raise Cain, don't you know.

ROSE: But he never said a word.

GERALD: He was simply ripping over it.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Putting her hands to her ears.*] Oh, oh, oh. For heaven's sake be calm and coherent.

GERALD: My dear, you don't know what a relief it is.

ROSE: I saw Gerald was dreadfully worried, and I wormed it out of him.

GERALD: I'm so glad to be out of the clutches of that brute.

ROSE: Now we're going to live happily ever afterwards.

[*All the while the ADMIRAL has been trying to get a word in, but each time he is about to start one of the others has broken in.*]

ADMIRAL: Silence. [*He puffs and blows.*] I never saw such a pair in my life.

LADY FREDERICK: Now do explain it all, Admiral. I can't make head or tail out of these foolish creatures.

ADMIRAL: Well, they came and told me that Montgomerie had an I.O.U. of Gerald's for nine hundred pounds and was using it to blackmail you.

FOULDES: Is that a fact?

LADY FREDERICK: Yes.

ADMIRAL: I never liked the man's face. And when they said his terms were that you were to marry him or Gerald would have to send in his papers, I said . . .

FOULDES: Damn his impudence.

ADMIRAL: How did you know?

FOULDES: Because I'd have said it myself.

GERALD: And the Admiral stumped up like a man. He gave me a cheque for the money, and I've just this moment sent it on to Montgomerie.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Taking both his hands.*] It's awfully good of you, and I'm sure you'll never regret that you gave Gerald a chance.

ADMIRAL: May I have a few words' private conversation with you?

LADY FREDERICK: Of course. [*To the others.*] Make yourselves scarce.

FOULDES: We'll go on the balcony, shall we?

ADMIRAL: I'm sorry to trouble you, but it'll only take three minutes.

[GERALD and ROSE and FOULDES go on to the balcony.]

LADY FREDERICK: [*When they've gone.*] There.

ADMIRAL: Well, what I wanted to say to you was this: I like Gerald, but I think he wants guiding. D'you follow me?

LADY FREDERICK: I'm sure he will take your advice always.

ADMIRAL: It's a woman's hand that he wants. Now if you and I were to join forces we could keep him out of mischief, couldn't we?

LADY FREDERICK: Oh, I'll come and stay with you whenever you ask me. I love giving good advice when I'm quite sure it won't be taken.

ADMIRAL: I was thinking of a more permanent arrangement. Look here, why don't you marry me?

LADY FREDERICK: My dear Admiral

ADMIRAL: I don't think an attractive woman like you ought to live alone. She's bound to get in a scrape.

LADY FREDERICK: It's awfully good of you, but . . .

ADMIRAL: You don't think I'm too old, do you?

LADY FREDERICK: Of course not. You're in the very prime of life.

ADMIRAL: There's life in the old dog yet, I can tell you.

LADY FREDERICK: I feel sure of that. I never doubted it for a moment.

ADMIRAL: Then what have you got against me?

LADY FREDERICK: You wouldn't like to commit polygamy, would you?

ADMIRAL: Eh?

LADY FREDERICK: You see, it's not a question of marrying me only, but all my tradespeople.

ADMIRAL: I hadn't thought of that.

LADY FREDERICK: Besides, you're Rose's father, and I'm Gerald's sister. If we married I should be my brother's mother-in-law, and my step-daughter would be my sister. Your daughter would be your sister-in-law, and your brother would just snap his fingers at your fatherly advice.

ADMIRAL: [*Confused.*] Eh?

LADY FREDERICK: I don't know if the prayer-book allows things like that, but if it does I think it's hopelessly immoral.

ADMIRAL: Well, shall I tell them I've changed my mind and they can't marry?

LADY FREDERICK: Then there'd be no reason for us to—
commit the crime, would there?

ADMIRAL: I hadn't thought of that. I suppose not.

LADY FREDERICK: You're not cross with me, are you? I'm
very much flattered, and I thank you from the bottom
of my heart.

ADMIRAL: Not at all, not at all. I only thought it might save
trouble.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Calling.*] Gerald. Come along. [*They
come in.*] We've had our little talk.

GERALD: Everything satisfactory?

LADY FREDERICK: [*With a look at the ADMIRAL.*] Quite.

ADMIRAL: [*Gruffly.*] Quite.

[LADY FREDERICK'S FOOTMAN enters.]

FOOTMAN: Captain Montgomerie wishes to know if he may
see your ladyship.

LADY FREDERICK: I'd forgotten all about him.

GERALD: Let me go to him, shall I?

LADY FREDERICK: No, I'm not afraid of him any longer. He
can't do anything to you. And as far as I'm concerned it
doesn't matter.

GERALD: Then I'll tell him to go to the devil.

LADY FREDERICK: No, I'm going to tell him that myself.
[*To the FOOTMAN.*] Ask Captain Montgomerie to come
here.

FOOTMAN: Yes, miladi. [*Exit.*]

LADY FREDERICK: [*Walking up and down furiously.*] I'm going
to tell him that myself.

FOULDES: Now keep calm, Betsy.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Very deliberately.*] I shall not keep calm.

FOULDES: Remember that you're a perfect lady.

LADY FREDERICK: Don't interfere with me. I ate humble pie yesterday, and it didn't agree with me at all.

[FOOTMAN *enters to announce* CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE, *who follows him, and immediately withdraws.*

FOOTMAN: Captain Montgomerie.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: How d'you do.

[*He is obviously surprised to see the others.*

LADY FREDERICK: [*Pleasantly.*] Quite a party, aren't we?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: Yes. [*A pause.*] I hope you don't mind my coming so early?

LADY FREDERICK: Not at all. You made an appointment for half-past ten.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: I trust you have good news for me.

LADY FREDERICK: Captain Montgomerie, every one here knows the circumstances that have brought you.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: I should have thought it wiser for both our sakes not to make them too public.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Very amiably.*] I don't see why you should be ashamed because you made me a proposal of marriage?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: I'm sorry you should think it a laughing matter, Lady Frederick.

LADY FREDERICK: I don't. I never laugh at an impertinence.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: [*Taken aback.*] I beg your pardon.

LADY FREDERICK: Surely the receipt of my brother's letter was sufficient answer for you. After that you must have guessed there was no likelihood that I should change my mind.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: What letter? I don't understand.

GERALD: I sent you a note this morning enclosing a cheque for the money I lost to you.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: I've not received it.

GERALD: It must be waiting for you at the hotel.

[CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE *pauses and looks meditatively at the assembled company.*

LADY FREDERICK: I think there's nothing for which I need detain you longer.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: [*Smiling.*] I don't think I've quite finished yet. Has it slipped your memory that the two bills fall due to-day? Allow me to present them.

[*He takes them out of his pocket-book.*

LADY FREDERICK: I'm very sorry I can't pay them—at present.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: I regret that I can't wait. You must pay them.

LADY FREDERICK: I tell you it's impossible.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: Then I shall get an order against you.

LADY FREDERICK: That you may do to your heart's content.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: You realise the consequences. It's not very nice to be an undischarged bankrupt.

LADY FREDERICK: Much nicer than to marry a rascally money-lender.

FOULDES: May I look at these interesting documents?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: Certainly. [*Blandly.*] I haven't the least wish to be offensive.

FOULDES: [*Taking them.*] You fail lamentably in achieving your wish. Three thousand five hundred pounds in all. It seems hardly worth while to make a fuss about so small a sum.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: I'm in urgent need of money.

FOULDES: [*Ironically.*] So rich a man as you?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: Even a rich man may be temporarily embarrassed.

FOULDES: Then be so good as to wait for one moment. [*He sits down at a table and writes a cheque.*] No sight is more affecting than that of a millionaire in financial straits.

LADY FREDERICK: Paradine!

FOULDES: [*Handing the cheque.*] Now sir, I think that settles it. Will you exchange my cheque for those bills?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: Damn you, I forgot you.

FOULDES: You may not be aware that it's unusual to swear in the presence of ladies.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE: [*Looking at the cheque.*] I suppose it's all right.

[*PARADINE goes to the door and opens it.*]

FOULDES: There is the window, and here is the door. Which will you choose?

[*CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE looks at him without answering, shrugs his shoulders and goes out.*]

LADY FREDERICK: Oh, Paradine, you are a brick.

GERALD: I say it's awfully good of you.

FOULDES: Nonsense. I've got a strong sense of effect, and I always cultivate the dramatic situation.

LADY FREDERICK: I shall never be able to pay you back, Paradine.

FOULDES: My dear, I'm not entirely devoid of intelligence.

ADMIRAL: Well, well, I must be off to take my constitutional.

LADY FREDERICK: And Rose and Gerald must take care of you. We shall all meet at luncheon.

ADMIRAL: Yes, yes.

[*The ADMIRAL, ROSE and GERALD go out. LADY FREDERICK goes up to PARADINE and takes his hands.*]

LADY FREDERICK: Thanks awfully. You are a good friend.

FOULDES: By George, how your eyes glitter!

LADY FREDERICK: It's only belladonna, you know.

FOULDES: I'm not such a fool as my nephew, my dear.

LADY FREDERICK: Why did you do it?

FOULDES: D'you know what gratitude is?

LADY FREDERICK: Thanks for past favours and a lively sense of benefits to come.

FOULDES: Well, yesterday you had my sister in the hollow of your hand. She gave you great provocation, and you burnt those confounded letters.

LADY FREDERICK: My dear Paradine, I can't get over my own magnanimity. And what are the benefits to come?

FOULDES: Well, it might be five per cent on the capital.

LADY FREDERICK: I don't know why you should squeeze my hands all the time.

FOULDES: But it isn't. Look here, don't you get awfully tired of racketting about?

LADY FREDERICK: Oh, my dear friend, I'm sick to death of it. I've got half a mind to retire from the world and bury myself in a hermitage.

FOULDES: So have I, and I've bought the lease of a little house in Norfolk Street, Park Lane.

LADY FREDERICK: Just the place for a hermitage—fashionable without being vulgar.

FOULDES: And I propose to live there quite quietly, and I shall just subsist on a few dried herbs, don't you know.

LADY FREDERICK: But do have them cooked by a really good French chef; it makes such a difference.

FOULDES: And what d'you say to joining me?

LADY FREDERICK: If

FOULDES: You.

LADY FREDERICK: Oh, I *am* a success to-day. That's another proposal of marriage.

FOULDES: It sounds very much like it.

LADY FREDERICK: I've already had three this morning.

FOULDES: Then I should think you've said no quite often enough.

LADY FREDERICK: Come at ten o'clock to-morrow, and you shall see me make up.

FOULDES: D'you think that would choke me off? D'you suppose I don't know that behind that very artificial complexion there's a dear little woman called Betsy who's genuine to the bottom of her soul?

LADY FREDERICK: Oh, don't be so sentimental or I shall cry.

FOULDES: Well, what is it to be?

LADY FREDERICK: [*Her voice breaking.*] D'you like me still, Paradine, after all these years?

FOULDES: Yes. [*She looks at him, her lips quivering. He stretches out his arms, and she, breaking down, hides her face on his shoulder.*] Now don't be an ass, Betsy. . . . I know you'll say in a minute I'm the only man you ever loved.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Looking up with a laugh.*] I shan't. . . . But what will your sister say?

FOULDES: I'll tell her there was only one way in which I could save Charlie from your clutches.

LADY FREDERICK: What?

FOULDES: By marrying you myself.

LADY FREDERICK: [*Putting up her face.*] Monster.

[*He kisses her lips.*]

THE END

MRS. DOT

A FARCE

in Three Acts

CHARACTERS

MRS. WORTHLEY

FREDDIE PERKINS, *her nephew and secretary*

MISS ELIZA MACGREGOR, *her aunt*

GERALD HALSTANE

JAMES BLENKINSOP

LADY SELLENGER

NELLIE, *her daughter*

CHARLES, *Gerald's servant*

MASON, *Mrs. Worthley's butler*

MR. WRIGHT, *a tailor*

MR. RIXON, *Gerald's solicitor*

BLENKINSOP'S MAN

TIME: 1905

MRS. DOT

THE FIRST ACT

SCENE: GERALD'S rooms in Grafton Street. *A man's room, pleasantly furnished, with very comfortable armchairs, and prints on the walls. Books are lying about, and smoking utensils.*

CHARLES, GERALD HALSTANE'S servant, opens the door. MR. WRIGHT comes in, a dapper young man, smartly dressed.

CHARLES: There, you can see for yourself that Mr. Halstane is not at home.

MR. WRIGHT: Very well, I'll wait for him.

CHARLES: You'll have to wait till midnight, because I don't expect him in.

MR. WRIGHT: Last time I came you said he'd be back in half an hour, and when I returned you said he'd just gone out. You don't catch me napping a second time.

CHARLES: The governor don't take impertinence lying down, Mr. Wright, and he'll look upon it as a great liberty your dunning him in this way.

MR. WRIGHT: I don't know about taking impertinence, but he'll have to take a summons if my account is not settled at once.

[There is a ring at the bell,

CHARLES: *[Ironically.]* Make yourself quite at home, won't you?

MR. WRIGHT: Thank you. I will.

[CHARLES goes out and leaves the door open so that the conversation with RIXON, the solicitor, is heard.

RIXON: *[Outside.]* Is Mr. Halstane in?

CHARLES: No, sir. He's gone to his club.

RIXON: Well, I'll ring him up. I must see him on a matter of the very greatest importance. You're on the telephone, aren't you?

CHARLES: Yes, sir. But there's a person waiting to see him.

RIXON: [*Coming in.*] Oh, never mind.

[*RIXON is a short, rubicund man, with white whiskers and a hearty manner.*]

MR. WRIGHT: [*Going towards him.*] Mr. Rixon. [*RIXON looks at him without recognising him.*] Don't you remember me, sir? I'm the junior partner in Andrews and Wright.

RIXON: Of course I do. I saw your father on business the other day. [*To CHARLES.*] Where's the telephone book?

CHARLES: I'll just go and fetch it, sir. Mr. Halstane lent it to the gentleman upstairs.

RIXON: Be as quick as you can. [*CHARLES goes out.*]

RIXON: [*To MR. WRIGHT.*] What are you doing here?

MR. WRIGHT: Well, the fact is, we've got a very large account with Halstane, and I'm told he's in queer street. I want to get the money before the crash comes.

RIXON: Queer street? The man's just come into seven thousand a year.

MR. WRIGHT: What!

RIXON: That's why I'm running all over the place to find him. You know he's a relation of the Hollingtons. I was at her ladyship's not half an hour ago—the Dowager, you know—my firm has acted for the whole family for the last hundred years. Well, I'd hardly arrived before a message came from the War Office to say that her grandson, the present lord, had been killed in India. So as soon as I could, I bolted round here. Mr. Halstane is the next heir, and he comes into seven thousand a year and the title.

MR. WRIGHT: My gracious, that's a piece of luck.

RIXON: I don't mind telling you now that he'd pretty well come to the end of his tether. Your money was all right because he'd have paid everything up, but he wouldn't have had much left.

MR. WRIGHT: Of course he doesn't know anything about this yet?

RIXON: Not a word. For all he knows, he's a ruined man; and here am I trying to get him on the telephone to tell him he's come into a peerage and a very handsome income. [CHARLES enters with the telephone book.

CHARLES: 7869 Gerrard, sir.

RIXON: Thanks.

[He rings up and asks for the number.

RIXON: 7869 Gerrard, please, Miss. . . . What? Confound it, the line's engaged. . . . I must go round to his club in a cab. I suppose you don't want to wait here now, Wright?

MR. WRIGHT: No, sir. I'll get back to the shop.

CHARLES: I 'ope you'll suit your own convenience, sir. [CHARLES shows them out and comes back.] I don't know what these tradespeople are coming to when they expect gentlemen to pay their bills.

[He seats himself in the most comfortable chair in the room and puts his feet on the table. His back is to the door. The newspaper is lying by his side. He shuts his eyes and dozes.

GERALD enters silently, followed immediately by BLINKINSOP and FREDDIE PERKINS. GERALD is a handsome man of seven or eight and twenty, simple in his manners, carefully dressed but without exaggeration. FREDDIE is a vivacious boy of two and twenty. BLINKINSOP is an old bachelor of five and forty; he is well-preserved and takes a good deal of care of his appearance. He is dressed in the height of fashion.

For a moment they look silently at CHARLES, who wakes with a start and jumps up in confusion.

CHARLES: I beg your pardon, sir; I didn't hear you come in.

GERALD: [*With an ironical politeness which he preserves during all his remarks to CHARLES.*] Pray don't let us disturb you. I shall never forgive myself if I think I've interrupted your nap.

CHARLES: Shall I take your hat, sir?

GERALD: It's very kind of you. I shouldn't like you to put yourself out.

FREDDIE: [*Sitting down.*] By Jove, what a ripping chair! No wonder that Charles went to sleep.

CHARLES: Mr. Rixon has just been, sir. He's gone on to the club.

GERALD: [*With a laugh.*] I'm not sorry to miss him. One's solicitor seldom has any good news to bring one.

CHARLES: Will you have the whisky and soda, sir?

GERALD: If it wouldn't give you too much trouble.

[*CHARLES goes out, and GERALD hands the cigarette box to BLENKINSOP and FREDDIE.*

GERALD: Sit down and make yourself comfortable, James.

BLENKINSOP: To do that is one of the few principles I've adhered to in the course of an easy and unadventurous life.

[*CHARLES enters with a tray on which are glasses, whisky and sodas.*

CHARLES: Is there anything else you want, sir?

GERALD: If you can spare me two minutes of your valuable time, I should like to make a few observations to you.

FREDDIE: Collect yourself, Charles, to receive the words of wisdom that fall from Mr. Halstane's lips.

CHARLES: Things is very bad on the Stock Exchange, sir.

GERALD: Charles, I have no objection to your sitting in my armchair and putting your feet on my table. I am willing to ignore the fact that you smoke my cigars and drink my whisky.

BLENKINSOP: [*Sipping.*] You show excellent judgment, Charles. The whisky's capital.

CHARLES: [*Imperturbably.*] Pot-still, sir. Fifteen years in bottle.

GERALD: I can even bear with equanimity that you should read my letters. For the most part they're excessively tedious, and they will only show you how deplorable is the education of the upper classes. But I must insist on your *not* reading my paper till I've done with it.

CHARLES: I'm very sorry, sir. I thought there was no objection.

GERALD: A newspaper, a suit of clothes, and a bottle of wine are three things at which I prefer . . .

CHARLES: To 'ave the first cut in, sir.

GERALD: I thank you, Charles; I couldn't have expressed my meaning more idiomatically.

FREDDIE: [*Laughing.*] You'd better have a drink.

CHARLES: Allow me, sir. [*He mixes a whiskey and soda.*]

GERALD: You need not pour out the whisky with such a generous hand as when you help yourself. Thank you.

CHARLES: Them mining shares of yours is very low, sir.

GERALD: They are.

CHARLES: If you'll remember, sir, I was all against them at the time you bought.

BLENKINSOP: You are a jewel, Charles, if besides administering to your master's wants you advise him in his financial transactions.

GERALD: Unless I'm mistaken, Charles strongly recommended me to invest my money in public-houses.

CHARLES: Them being frequented in peace and war, and not subject to clandestine removals. In peace men drink to celebrate their 'appiness, and in war to drown their sorrow.

GERALD: [*Smiling.*] You are a philosopher, Charles and it cuts me to the quick that I should be forced to deny myself the charm of your conversation.

CHARLES: [*Astonished.*] I beg your pardon, sir?

GERALD: I am endeavouring to give you notice in such a manner as not to outrage your susceptibilities.

CHARLES: Me, sir? I'm sorry if I don't give satisfaction.

GERALD: On the contrary, you give every satisfaction. It has never been my good fortune to run across a servant who had an equal talent for blacking boots and for repartee. I am grateful for the care with which you have kept my wardrobe, and the encouragement you have offered to my attempts at humour. I have never seen you perturbed by a rebuke, or discouraged by ill-temper. Your merits, in fact, are overwhelming, but I'm afraid I must ask you to find another place.

BLINKINSOP: You really shouldn't be so abrupt, Gerald. Look at him staggering under the blow.

CHARLES: I'm very comfortable here, sir. Can you give me no reason for this decision?

GERALD: You gave it yourself, Charles. As you justly observed, them mining shares is very low. You are sufficiently acquainted with my correspondence to be aware that my creditors have passed with singular unanimity from the stage of remonstrance to that of indignation.

BLINKINSOP: I say, I'm sorry to hear this, old man.

CHARLES: If it's just a matter of wages, sir, I shall be 'appy to wait till it suits your convenience to pay me.

GERALD: [*With a smile of thanks.*] I'm grateful to you for that

Charles; but, honestly, do you think half-measures can be of any use to me?

CHARLES: Well, sir, so far as I'm acquainted with your circumstances . . .

GERALD: Come, come, this modesty ill becomes you. Is there a bill in this room, or a solicitor's letter, with which you are not intimately acquainted?

CHARLES: Well, sir, if you ask me outright—things is pretty bad.

FREDDIE: I say, don't play the ass any more. What the deuce does it all mean?

GERALD: I'm sorry the manner in which I'm imparting to you an interesting piece of information, doesn't meet with your approval. Would you like me to tear my hair in handfuls?

BLENKINSOP: It would be picturesque, but painful.

FREDDIE: Are you really broke?

GERALD: So much so that I've to-day sublet my rooms. In a week, Charles, I shall cast the dust of London off my feet, a victim to the British custom of primogeniture.

CHARLES: Yes, sir.

GERALD: Have you the least idea what I mean?

CHARLES: No, sir.

GERALD: Well, I feel certain that during some of the many leisure moments you have enjoyed in my service, you have cast an eye upon that page in Burke upon which my name figures—insignificantly.

CHARLES: Begging your pardon, sir, I looked you up in the Peerage before I accepted the situation.

GERALD: It rejoices me to learn that your investigations were satisfactory.

CHARLES: Well, sir, always having lived before with titled gentlemen, I felt I owed it to myself to be careful.

GERALD: I am overpowered by your condescension, Charles. It never occurred to me that you were taking my character while I was taking yours.

CHARLES: If servants wanted as good characters from masters as masters want from servants, I 'ave an idea that many gentlemen would 'ave to clean their own boots.

GERALD: You scintillate, Charles, but I deplore your tendency to digress.

CHARLES: I beg pardon, sir. As you was the second son of an honourable and very well connected, I didn't mind stretching a point. If I may say so, your father was almost a nobleman.

GERALD: The consequence is, however, that I was brought up without in the least knowing how to earn my living. I belong to that vast army of younger sons whose sole means of livelihood is a connection with a peer of the realm and such mother-wit as Dame Nature has provided them with. *[A ring is heard.]*

CHARLES: There's some one at the door, sir. Are you at home?

GERALD: No, I expect two ladies to tea in half an hour, but you must admit no one else. These gentlemen will be forced to deprive me of their society in twenty-five minutes.

BLINKINSOP: Not at all. Not at all.

GERALD: I repeat with considerable firmness that these gentlemen will be compelled by a previous engagement to leave me in *twenty* minutes.

BLINKINSOP: It'll be difficult after that to make our departure seem perfectly natural, won't it?

[A second ring is heard.]

GERALD: Nobody's to come in.

CHARLES: Very good, sir.

[He goes out.]

BLENKINSOP: I say, old man, I'm awfully sorry to hear this bad news of yours. Can't I do anything to help you?

GERALD: No thanks.

[The bell is rung continuously with the greatest impatience.]

FREDDIE: By Jove, whoever your visitor is, he doesn't like being kept waiting.

MRS. DOT: *[Outside.]* Is Mr. Halstane at home?

FREDDIE: *[Softly.]* Why, it's my aunt.

BLENKINSOP: Mrs. Dot.

GERALD: Ssh!

CHARLES: Not at home, madam.

MRS. DOT: *[Outside.]* Nonsense. I want to see him very particularly.

CHARLES: I'm very sorry, madam. Mr. Halstane went out not five minutes ago. I almost wonder you didn't meet him on the stairs.

MRS. DOT: Yes, I know all about that.

[MRS. WORTHLEY comes in. She is a pretty little woman, very wonderfully gowned. She is frank, open and full of spirits. CHARLES follows her into the room.]

MRS. DOT: Oh! Three of you. Charles, how can you tell such stories?

CHARLES: *[Very gravely.]* Mr. Halstane is *not* at home, madam.

GERALD: *[Coming forward and taking her hand.]* Charles is shocked at your lack of decorum.

MRS. DOT: Run away, Charles. And don't do it again. . . . I suppose you think this sort of thing isn't done in the best families?

CHARLES: *[Stiffly.]* No, madam.

MRS. DOT: I saw one of my drays outside, so I thought I'd just look in to see how you liked it.

CHARLES: [*Idly.*] I beg your pardon, madam?

MRS. DOT: The beer, my good man, the beer! Don't you know that I'm *Worthley's Entire*?

CHARLES: I never gave the subject a thought, madam.

MRS. DOT: And very good our half-crown family ale is, although I say it as shouldn't.

GERALD: You may go, Charles.

[*Without a word, much on his dignity, CHARLES departs.*]

GERALD: [*Gaily.*] It's fortunate I've just given him notice, because Charles would certainly never stay in a house where he'd been so grossly insulted.

MRS. DOT: I love shocking Charles. He's so genteel. Whenever I come here I see him obviously trying not to show that he's perfectly well aware that I have anything to do with trade.

BLENKINSOP: The world is so degenerate that it's only among domestic servants that you find any respect for landed gentry and any contempt for commerce.

MRS. DOT: [*To FREDDIE.*] I'm glad to see that you're not ruining your health by working too hard as my secretary.

FREDDIE: I've been lunching with Blenkinsop. I answered about fifty begging letters before I came out this morning.

MRS. DOT: [*To GERALD.*] You've not said you're glad to see me yet.

GERALD: I'm not sure that I am, very.

MRS. DOT: [*Not at all disconcerted.*] Then say you like my frock.

GERALD: Yes, it's very nice.

MRS. DOT: Very nice! I should think it was very nice. There's no one in London who'd venture to wear anything half so outrageous. And as for the hat . . .

BLENKINSOP: The hat's hideous. But I suppose it's fashionable.

MRS. DOT: My dear James, where were you educated?

BLINKINSOP: At Eton.

MRS. DOT: Well, they taught you nothing about clothes.

BLINKINSOP: I wish sometimes that nice women wouldn't get themselves up as if they were no better than they should be.

MRS. DOT: Don't be so absurd. The ideal of a woman who takes any pains about her frocks is to look as like an abandoned hussy as she possibly can.

[MRS. DOT chooses the most comfortable chair in the room.]

GERALD: I'm afraid I can't ask you to sit down.

MRS. DOT: Oh, don't trouble. I'm perfectly capable of doing that of my own accord. . . . If you think I'm going before you've answered a hundred and fifty questions you're very much mistaken. First, I want to know why you've not been near me for the last week? Then why you try to keep me out of the place? And lastly, why you show every desire to get rid of me when I'm here.

GERALD: I've not seen you because I've been uncommonly busy. I said I was not at home because I'm in the worst possible temper. And I want to get rid of you because I'm expecting somebody else.

MRS. DOT: I suppose if I were a thoroughly tactful person I should now ring for my carriage?

GERALD: I daresay you would ask me to ring for it.

MRS. DOT: Well, I shall neither do the one nor the other. In the first place your answers are all nonsense and in the second I want to know who's coming? If it's some one I know, I shall stop and say, How d'you do, and if it isn't I want to see what *it's* like.

GERALD: I suppose you know I'm perfectly capable of turning you out by main force.

MRS. DOT: If you touch me I shall scream.

[*She looks quickly at FREDDIE and BLENKINSOP, then gives a smile.*]

MRS. DOT: Oh, Freddie, I quite forgot. I've got a pile of letters that I found on my way out this afternoon. There are three poor clergymen who can't pay their bills, and there are five elderly spinsters who don't know which way to turn for their quarter's rent, and there are seven deserving ladies with a starving husband each and sixteen children.

BLENKINSOP: How very immoral!

MRS. DOT: It would be much more immoral if they had a starving child each and sixteen husbands.

BLENKINSOP: I suppose it's never occurred to you that you do a great deal more harm than good by your indiscriminate charity?

MRS. DOT: Don't be such an old frump. If it gives me a certain amount of pleasure to give money away, why on earth shouldn't I? I daresay that nineteen out of every twenty people I help are thoroughly worthless, but it's only by doing something for them all that I can be quite certain of not missing the twentieth.

FREDDIE: D'you want me to write to them at once?

MRS. DOT: This very minute.

FREDDIE: [*With a smile.*] But that'll only get rid of me, you know. Blenkinsop will still be here.

MRS. DOT: [*Coolly.*] James, do go and see that Freddie writes his letters nicely. He's only just come down from Oxford, and his spelling is rather shaky.

BLENKINSOP: [*With a grunt.*] You can give us a shout when you've had your talk.

MRS. DOT: Now mind, Freddie. I before E except after C.

[*They go out.*]

GERALD: [*Laughing.*] You're a very bold woman, Mrs. Dot.

MRS. DOT: [*With a change of tone.*] What's the matter, Gerald?

GERALD: [*Surprised.*] With me?

MRS. DOT: Won't you tell an old friend?

GERALD: [*After a very short pause.*] Nothing that you can help me in, Mrs. Dot.

MRS. DOT: Won't you leave the Mrs. out? It makes me feel so five and thirtyish.

GERALD: You're a ripping good sort, and we've had some charming times together. I'm glad that you came to-day, because it's given me an opportunity to thank you for all your kindness to me.

MRS. DOT: My dear boy, what *are* you talking about?

GERALD: Well, the fact is, I've been spending a good deal of money lately, and I'm rather broke.

MRS. DOT: How stupid of me! I've always had such lots myself it never occurs to me that any one else may be hard up. And I've let you pay all sorts of things for me, theatres and dinners and heaven knows what. I must owe you a perfect fortune.

GERALD: Nonsense! You don't owe me a penny.

MRS. DOT: Well then, in future I insist on paying for everything. I'm not going to give up our little dinners at the Savoy and our suppers and all the rest of it. Don't be so silly. You know I have ten times more money than I know what to do with.

GERALD: Yes, I can see you furtively slipping your purse into my hand so that I should pay for a luncheon, and giving me a shilling over for the cab. No, thank you.

MRS. DOT: Then we'll economise together. It only means going to the pit of a theatre instead of taking a box. Well, I like the pit much better. You see all the women come in and you criticise their back hair. And you suck delicious oranges all the time. It makes my mouth water to think of it. And we'll go on a bus instead of taking cabs. They're much safer, and I like sitting on the front

seat and talking to the driver. Bus-drivers are always such handsome men.

GERALD: It's not a question of driving in buses, but of walking on my flat feet.

MRS. DOT: Very well. You shall walk on your flat feet, and I'll trip along by your side on my arched instep.

GERALD: Things have come to such a pass that I must either beg, steal, or work.

MRS. DOT: Then tell me exactly how matters stand.

GERALD: It would only bore you, and besides you wouldn't understand.

MRS. DOT: Now you're talking through your hat, my friend. You're simply talking through your hat. I flatter myself there are few men who have a better head for business than I have. Why, since my husband died I've almost doubled our profits. The brewery has never been so flourishing. I've told the British People on fifty thousand hoardings to drink Worthley's Half-crown Family Ale, and by Jove, the British People do.

GERALD: You funny little thing.

MRS. DOT: Well, now tell me all about it, and let's see if things can't be put straight.

GERALD: Oh, my dear, I'm afraid they're in a most awful mess. I never had much money to start with, and I got into debt. Then I tried a flutter on the Stock Exchange, and the confounded shares went down steadily from the day I bought.

MRS. DOT: It's a way shares have when fools buy them.

GERALD: But I daresay I could have weathered that, only a pal of mine got into a hole, and I backed a bill for him.

MRS. DOT: You don't mean to say you did that?

GERALD: I was obliged to. I couldn't let him go under without trying to do something.

MRS. DOT: You donkey, you perfect donkey!

GERALD: He swore he'd be able to pay the money.

MRS. DOT: I never knew a man yet, or a woman either for that matter, who'd stick at a thundering lie when he wanted money. And what's the result?

GERALD: Well, the result is that after I've paid everything up, I shall have about five hundred pounds left. I'm proposing to go out to America and rough it a bit.

MRS. DOT: Pardon my asking, but do you think a handsome face, a talent for small talk, and a certain charm of manner will enable you to earn your daily bread?

GERALD: [*Laughing.*] I don't want to seem vain, but although I've done my best to conceal them, I fancy I have two or three other qualifications which will be of more service.

MRS. DOT: Then the long and the short of it is that you're ruined.

GERALD: Absolutely.

MRS. DOT: I'm delighted to hear it.

GERALD: Dot!

MRS. DOT: I am. I can't help it. But I think your plan of going to the States is simply foolish.

GERALD: What else *can* I do? The Cape's entirely played out.

MRS. DOT: You stupid creature.

GERALD: I beg your pardon!

MRS. DOT: You belong to a class whose chief resource when it has squandered its money is a rich marriage. The custom is so well recognised that when a man of good family emigrates rather than have recourse to it, society is outraged and suspicious.

GERALD: Thanks. I don't think I can see myself marrying for money.

MRS. DOT: Don't be so absurd. I never heard that the course of true love ran any less smoothly because a charming widow had sixty thousand a year.

GERALD: What *do* you mean?

MRS. DOT: My dear boy, I'm not a perfect fool. A man thinks a woman never sees anything unless she looks at it with both eyes at once wide open. Don't you know that she can see things through the back of her head with a stone wall in between?

GERALD: What have you seen, then?

MRS. DOT: I've seen a thousand things. I've seen your eyes light up when I came into the room, I've seen you watch me when you thought I wasn't looking. I've seen you scowl at any young fool who paid me an outrageous compliment. I've seen the pleasure it gave you to do me any trifling service. I've seen you watch for the opportunity of putting my cloak on my shoulders after the play. And—I'm sorry—but I've come to the conclusion that you're in love with me. I dare say the fact has escaped your notice, but that's only because men are so deplorably stupid.

GERALD: [*Gravely.*] D'you think it's quite kind to laugh at me now?

MRS. DOT: But I'm not laughing at you, my dear. I'm so pleased, and so flattered and so touched. At first I thought I was only a fool, and that I saw those things only because I wanted to. And when your hand trembled a little as it took mine, I was afraid it was only my hand that was trembling. And at last when I was certain that you were just as much in love with me as I was with you, I was so glad that I cried for two hours. And I had to use a whole box of powder before I could make myself presentable again.

GERALD: [*Grimly.*] I'm afraid you'll think me an utter brute. I ought to have told you long ago that I'm engaged to be married.

MRS. DOT: Gerald!

GERALD: I've been engaged to Nellie Sellenger for the last three years.

MRS. DOT: Why didn't you tell me?

GERALD: No one was supposed to know anything about it. And—I was afraid of losing you. Oh, Dot, Dot, I love you with all my heart. And I'm so glad to be forced to tell you at last.

MRS. DOT: But I don't understand in the least.

GERALD: You know Nellie Sellenger is an old friend of mine.

MRS. DOT: Yes, it was at the Sellengers I first met you.

GERALD: Well, three years ago we were staying at the same place in the country, and I was a young fool.

MRS. DOT: You mean that there was no other girl there, and so you flirted with her. But you need not have asked her to marry you.

GERALD: [*Apologetically.*] It was the merest accident. It came to pieces in my 'ands, so to speak.

MRS. DOT: Really?

GERALD: We were taking a walk in the garden after dinner, and a perfectly absurd moon was shining. It seemed the obvious thing to do.

MRS. DOT: And of course she accepted. The girl of eighteen always does.

GERALD: But Lady Sellenger refused to hear of it. She thought me most ineligible.

MRS. DOT: Lady Sellenger's a sensible woman. She was quite right.

GERALD: I'm not so sure. If she'd given us her blessing and told us to do as we liked, we should probably have broken it off in three weeks. But she was really rather offensive about it. She refused to let Nellie see me, and the result was that we were always running across one another in Bond Street tea-shops.

MRS. DOT: Monstrous! And so bad for the digestion.

GERALD: Some time ago Lady Sellenger found out that we were writing to one another and so on, so she came to see me and said she'd made up her mind to take Nellie abroad for a year. She made me promise to hold no communication with her during that time, and agreed that if we were still of the same mind when they came back, she would withdraw the opposition and let us be properly engaged.

MRS. DOR: An announcement in the *Morning Post* and all that sort of thing?

GERALD: I suppose so.

MRS. DOR: And when are they coming back?

GERALD: They came back last week. But I haven't had a chance of speaking to Nellie yet. The year is up to-day, and this morning I had a note from Lady Sellenger asking if they might come to tea.

MRS. DOR: And what are you going to say to her?

GERALD: Good heavens! What can I say? I was poor enough a year ago, but now I'm penniless. I'm bound to ask for my release.

MRS. DOR: Then why on earth have you been trying to make me utterly miserable?

GERALD: You know, I don't want to seem an awful prig, but I don't think I should much like doing anything shabby. If Nellie wants me to keep my promise I shan't draw back.

MRS. DOR: Oh, but she won't. She'll be only too glad to get rid of you.

GERALD: I'm afraid there's something else I must tell you.

MRS. DOR: More? Don't say you've got a horrible past, because I shan't turn a hair.

GERALD: No, it's not that. You know that Lord Hollington is a relation of mine.

MRS. DOT: Only a fifteenth cousin, isn't he? Far too distant to brag about.

GERALD: A year ago three lives stood between me and the peerage. It seemed impossible that I could ever come into anything.

MRS. DOT: Well?

GERALD: But last winter my cousin George unfortunately broke his neck in the hunting-field, and his poor old father died of the shock. If anything happened to my cousin Charles everything would come to me.

MRS. DOT: And Lady Sellenger would doubtless withdraw her opposition to your marriage.

GERALD: She's a very nice woman, but she has rather a keen eye for the main chance.

MRS. DOT: Even her best friend would hesitate to call her disinterested. But why should anything happen to Lord Hollington? He's quite young, isn't he? I saw his engagement announced in the *Morning Post* a little while ago.

GERALD: He's out in India at this moment. He's a soldier you know. It appears there's some trouble on the North-West Frontier, and he's in command of the expedition.

MRS. DOT: Oh, but nothing is going to happen to him. He'll live till he's eighty.

GERALD: I'm sure I hope he will.

MRS. DOT: Say again that you love me, Gerald.

GERALD: [*Smiling.*] I oughtn't to yet.

MRS. DOT: You know, you've got to marry me. I insist upon it. After all, you've been trifling with my affections shamefully. Oh, we shall be so happy, Gerald. And we'll never grow any older than we are now. You know, I'm an awfully good sort, really. I talk a lot of nonsense, but I don't mean it. I very seldom listen to it

myself. I'm sick of society. I want to settle down and be domesticated. I'll sit at home and darn your socks. And I shall hate it, and I shall be so happy. And if you want to be independent you can have a job at the brewery. We want a smart energetic man to keep us up to the times. And we'll have a lovely box at the opera, and you can always get away for the shooting.

[A ring is heard.]

GERALD: There they are.

MRS. DOT: Good heavens! I quite forgot about those wretched people in there.

[She opens the door of the dining-room.]

MRS. DOT: I don't want to disturb you, but if you've quite finished your conversation perhaps you'd like to come and have tea.

[BLENKINSOP and FREDDIE come in and go to the fire.]

BLENKINSOP: I observe with interest that your remark is facetious.

FREDDIE: I'm simply freezing.

MRS. DOT: You didn't mind being shut up in there, did you?

BLENKINSOP: Not at all. I rather like sitting in an arctic room without a fire, with a window looking on a blank wall, and the society of your nephew and the *Sporting Times* of the week before last as my only means of entertainment.

[CHARLES enters to announce the SELLENGERS. He goes out and brings in the tea.]

CHARLES: Lady and Miss Sellenger.

[Enter LADY SELLENGER and NELLIE. LADY SELLENGER is a pompous woman of fifty, stout, alert and clever. NELLIE is very pretty and graceful, and fashionably gowned. She appears to be much under her mother's influence.]

LADY SELLENGER: How d'you do? Ah, Mrs. Worthley! Delightful.

GERALD: [*Shaking hands.*] How d'you do? I think you know Mr. Blenkinsop?

LADY SELLENGER: Of course. But I don't approve of him.

BLINKINSOP: Why not?

LADY SELLENGER: Because you're a cynic, a millionaire, and a bachelor. And no man has the right to be all three.

MRS. DOT: And how did you like Italy?

LADY SELLENGER: A grossly over-rated place. So many marriageable daughters and so few eligible men.

GERALD: [*Introducing.*] Mr. Perkins, Lady Sellenger—Miss Sellenger.

MRS. DOT: My nephew and my secretary.

LADY SELLENGER: Really. How very interesting! Almost romantic.

FREDDIE: How d'you do?

LADY SELLENGER: Dear Mrs. Worthley, what a charming gown! You always wear such—striking things.

MRS. DOT: It advertises the beer, don't you know.

LADY SELLENGER: I wish I could drink it, Mrs. Worthley, but it's so fattening. I understand you always have it on your table.

MRS. DOT: I think that's the least I can do, as it's only on account of the beer that I can have a table at all.

NELLIE: [*To Mrs. Dot.*] May I give you some tea?

MRS. DOT: [*Going to the tea-table.*] Thanks so much.

[*GERALD comes over to LADY SELLENGER with a cup. She takes it. The others are gathered round the tea-table, which is right at the back, and talk among themselves*]

LADY SELLENGER: Come and sit by me, Gerald. I've not had a word with you since we came back from Italy.

GERALD: [*Lightly.*] What are you going to say to me?

LADY SELLENGER: You can guess why I wrote to ask if we might come and see you to-day?

GERALD: [*Rising.*] Yes.

LADY SELLENGER: Now do sit down. And look as if you were talking of the weather.

GERALD: It's a little difficult to discuss the matter quite indifferently.

LADY SELLENGER: My dear boy, it's the little difficulties of life which prevent it from being dull. We should be no better than the beasts of the field if we had no anxieties about our soul and our position in society.

GERALD: I see.

LADY SELLENGER: [*Rather impatiently.*] My dear Gerald, why don't you help me? What I have to say is so very unpleasant. You know I have always had a most sincere affection for you. Under other circumstances I would have wanted no better son-in-law.

GERALD: It's very kind of you to say so.

LADY SELLENGER: I've assured you for the last three years that a marriage was absurd, and now I want to tell you that it's impossible. Love is all very well in its way, but it doesn't make up for a shabby house in the suburbs.

GERALD: You're not romantic, Lady Sellenger.

LADY SELLENGER: My dear, when you reach my age you'll agree with me that it's only the matter of fact which really signifies. Love in a cottage is a delusion of youth. It's difficult enough after ten years of solid matrimony in Grosvenor Square.

GERALD: You married for love, Lady Sellenger.

LADY SELLENGER: I'm anxious that my daughter shouldn't make the same mistake. Now let us be quite frank with one another. . . . Are you sure they're not listening?

GERALD: [*Glancing at the others.*] They seem very much occupied with their own affairs. What is your ultimatum?

LADY SELLENGER: Well, Gerald, I'm not in the least mercenary. I know that money can't give happiness. But I do feel that unless you have at least two thousand a year you can't make my daughter even comfortable.

GERALD: I'm sure that's very modest.

LADY SELLENGER: It's not love in a cottage. It's not love in a palace. It's just—matrimony in Onslow Gardens.

GERALD: I may as well tell you at once that I've had very bad luck. I wanted to make money, and I've come an absolute cropper.

LADY SELLENGER: My dear Gerald, I'm very sorry. Is it as bad as all that?

GERALD: It couldn't be much worse.

LADY SELLENGER: Dear me, that's very sad. But, of course, it simplifies matters, doesn't it?

GERALD: Enormously. It puts marriage entirely out of the question and leaves only one course open to me. I'll take the earliest opportunity to ask Nellie for my release.

LADY SELLENGER: What a pity it is you're so poor! Your principles are really excellent.

GERALD: But what about Nellie? How will she take it?

LADY SELLENGER: She's so reserved, poor dear! She never speaks of her feelings. But after three London seasons most girls have learnt to bow to the inevitable. And how is Lord Hollington?

GERALD: He's to be married as soon as he comes back from India.

LADY SELLENGER: It was dreadfully sad that his uncle and his cousin should die within a year. If anything happened to him you'd be in very different circumstances. But, of

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course it would be wicked to wish it. I hope you never do.

GERALD: Never. I trust he'll live to a hundred.

LADY SELLENGER: And I daresay he'll have fifteen children. Those delicate men often do. . . . Why don't you speak to Nellie now and get it over?

GERALD: This very minute? With others in the room?

LADY SELLENGER: That's just it. I want to give neither of you any opportunity for sentiment.

GERALD: You're certainly very practical.

LADY SELLENGER: No woman can afford to be sentimental when she has a marriageable daughter. . . . For heaven's sake don't make Nellie cry, we're dining out to-night.

GERALD: I'll do my best to be very matter of fact.

LADY SELLENGER: [*Raising her voice.*] Mr. Blenkinsop, I want to quarrel with you!

BLENKINSOP: [*Coming forward.*] You fill me with consternation.

LADY SELLENGER: You passed us in Pall Mall this afternoon and you cut us dead.

BLENKINSOP: I'm so sorry, I didn't see you. I'd just been to the War Office to inquire if there was any news of those fellows out in India. By the way, Halstane, isn't Hollington a relation of yours?

GERALD: Yes, why?

BLENKINSOP: Haven't you seen anything in the paper?

GERALD: No.

BLENKINSOP: Oh, but surely. There's sure to be something about it in the *Westminster*. [*He takes up the paper.*]

GERALD: That's an early one.

[*Faintly are heard the cries of "Special."*]

FREDDIE: Listen, there's the last edition coming along.

LADY SELLENGER: But what is it, Mr. Blenkinsop?

BLINKINSOP: A small force was sent out to punish some local people up in the hills, who'd been making themselves troublesome, and it hasn't been heard of since. The idea is that there may have been some trouble and they've all got cut up.

MRS. DOT: But how does it concern Lord Hollington?

BLINKINSOP: He was in command of it.

GERALD: Good God!

BLINKINSOP: When I was there a couple of hours ago the War Office had no news at all.

GERALD: But why didn't you tell me about it?

BLINKINSOP: I thought you knew. I'd forgotten for the moment that Hollington had anything to do with you. He's a very distant relation, isn't he?

GERALD: Yes, I hardly know him.

LADY SELLENGER: But if anything has happened to him . . .

[Cries outside of "Special, Special."

MRS. DOT: Why don't you get a paper? Freddie, run and get one, will you?

GERALD: No, Charles can go.

[He rings, and CHARLES immediately comes in.]

GERALD: Oh, Charles, get a paper at once. Hurry up!

CHARLES: Very good, sir.

[He goes out. Outside, cries of "Terrible catastrophe in India."

GERALD: By Jove, did you hear that?

[Cries of "Special, Special."

LADY SELLENGER: Why doesn't he make haste?

GERALD: Nonsense. It can't have anything to do with Hollington.

MRS. DOT: [*With her hand on his arm, anxiously.*] Gerald.

[FREDDIE PERKINS *is looking out of the window.*

FREDDIE: Here's Charles. By Jove, he isn't hurrying himself much.

GERALD: Has he got a newsboy?

FREDDIE: Yes. What the deuce is he doing?

GERALD: [*At the window.*] Good lord, he's reading the paper.

LADY SELLENGER: The suspense is too awful.

FREDDIE: There's another newsboy running down the street.

[*Cries of "Special, Special."*

GERALD: Thank God, he's coming upstairs at last. I should like to kick him.

[*Cries of "Terrible catastrophe in India. 'Eroic death of Lord 'Ollington."*

Good God!

[*They all remain in silence, full of consternation* CHARLES *enters with the paper.*

Hurry up, man! What the deuce have you been doing?

[*He snatches the paper from him.*

CHARLES: [*With dignity.*] I made all the 'aste I could, my lord.

[*GERALD stops for a moment from looking up and down the paper, and stares at him.*

GERALD: What the dickens d'you mean?

[*He looks at the paper, reads, and drops it.*

MRS. DOT: Is it true, Gerald?

[*He looks at her and nods.*

GERALD: Poor chap. And just as he was going to be married.

CHARLES: Shall I bring your hat and coat, my lord?

GERALD: What on earth are you talking about?

CHARLES: I thought your lordship would like to go round to the War Office.

GERALD: Shut up! [Exit CHARLES.]

LADY SELLENGER: My dear boy, I congratulate you with all my heart.

GERALD: Oh, don't remind me of that already.

LADY SELLENGER: I can quite understand you're a little upset, but after all he was only a very distant relation of yours.

BLENKINSOP: I don't understand what all this means.

GERALD: Didn't you hear that fool of a servant? It was the first thing he thought of.

MRS. DOT: Gerald succeeds to the peerage!

GERALD: Yes.

MRS. DOT: Wouldn't you like us to leave you alone? I'm sure you want to think things out a bit?

LADY SELLENGER: Come, Nellie!

GERALD: I'm sorry to turn you out. Good-bye. I had something to say to you, Nellie.

NELLIE: We've not had a chance of speaking to one another.

LADY SELLENGER: [*Unctuously.*] It's very fortunate. Now you'll have much pleasanter things to talk about.

[*He stares at her without understanding.*]

LADY SELLENGER: Things are very different now, Gerald. It just came in time, didn't it?

NELLIE: Good-bye.

[*LADY SELLENGER and NELLIE go out.*]

BLENKINSOP: Good-bye, old man. I'm sorry your cousin has had such an awful death. But after all, we none of us knew him and we do know you. I can't tell you how glad I am that all your difficulties are at an end.

GERALD: I would give my right hand to bring Hollington back to life again.

BIENKINSOP: Good-bye.

[*He goes out.*]

MRS. DOT: Go away, Freddie. I want to talk to Gerald.

FREDDIE: Good-bye, old man. I say, what a nice girl Miss Sellenger is!

GERALD: Good-bye.

[*FREDDIE goes out.*]

MRS. DOT: Well?

GERALD: The news has come just an hour too soon. It's bound me hand and foot.

MRS. DOT: What d'you mean by that?

GERALD: Nellie accepted me when I was poor and of no account. Now that I'm well off I can't go to her and say: I've changed my mind and don't want to marry you.

MRS. DOT: What d'you mean by being well off?

GERALD: I believe I shall have six or seven thousand a year.

MRS. DOT: But you can't live on that. It's absurd.

GERALD: [*With a smile.*] There are people who live on much less, you know.

MRS. DOT: Besides, she doesn't care for you in the least. I could see that at a glance.

GERALD: How?

MRS. DOT: A girl who loved you wouldn't have a skirt cut like that.

GERALD: I can't draw back now, Dot. You must see that I can't.

MRS. DOT: If you cared for me, you'd easily find some way out of the difficulty.

GERALD: I must be honest, Dot. . . . I don't want to seem a snob, but I've got an ancient name, and it's rather honourable. I'm by way of being the head of the family now. I don't want to begin by acting like a cad.

MRS. DOT: You know, I'm much nicer than Nellie. I'm more amusing, and I'm better dressed, and I've got five motor cars. It's true she's younger than I am, but I don't

feel a day more than seventeen. [*With a little look at him.*]
And if you had any sense of decency at all you'd say I
looked it. You said you loved me just now. Say it
again, Gerald. It's so good to hear.

GERALD: I don't see how we can help ourselves.

MRS. DOT: [*Beginning to lose her temper.*] I suppose you just
want to finish an awkward scene? I don't want to
harrow you. Why don't you go to the War Office?

GERALD: You must see it's not my fault. If we must part, let
us part friends.

MRS. DOT: Now, I declare he wants to sentimentalise. Isn't
it enough that you've made me frightfully unhappy?
D'you want me to say it doesn't matter at all, as if you'd
spilt a cup of tea on me? D'you think I like being
utterly wretched?

GERALD: For heaven's sake, don't talk like that. You're
tearing my heart to pieces.

MRS. DOT: *Your* heart? I should like to bang it on the floor
and stamp on it. You must expect to suffer a little. You
can't put it all on me.

GERALD: I don't want you to suffer.

MRS. DOT: [*In a temper.*] You were willing enough to marry
me when you hadn't got sixpence to bless yourself with.
How fortunate your cousin didn't die a week later!

GERALD: Do you think I was proposing to marry you for
your money?

MRS. DOT: Yes.

GERALD: Really?

MRS. DOT: No, of course not.

GERALD: Thanks.

MRS. DOT: Oh, you needn't take it as a compliment. I'd
much sooner have to deal with a clever knave than an
honest fool.

GERALD: Won't you say that you bear me no ill-will?

MRS. DOT: No.

GERALD: I really must go to the War Office.

MRS. DOT: Very well, you can go.

GERALD: Won't you come with me?

MRS. DOT: No.

GERALD: I'm afraid you'll get rather bored here.

[He rings the bell, and CHARLES comes in.]

CHARLES: Yes, my lord.

GERALD: I want my hat and coat. *[CHARLES goes out.]*

MRS. DOT: Do you care for Nellie Sellenger?

GERALD: If you don't mind, I won't answer that question
Unless she asks for her freedom, I propose to marry her

[CHARLES brings in the hat and coat. MRS. DOT watches him while he puts them on.]

GERALD: Good-bye.

[He goes out. MRS. DOT turns round and faces CHARLES.]

MRS. DOT: Charles, have you ever been married?

CHARLES: Twice, madam.

MRS. DOT: And has experience taught you that when a woman wants a thing she generally gets it?

CHARLES: *[With a sigh.]* It has, madam.

MRS. DOT: That is my opinion, too, Charles.

[She goes out. CHARLES begins to clear the tea things away.]

END OF THE FIRST ACT

THE SECOND ACT

The terrace of Mrs. DOT's house on the River. There are masses of rose trees in full flower. At the back is the house, covered with creepers.

A table is set out for luncheon, with four chairs.

MISS MACGREGOR *is sitting in a garden chair, sewing. She is an elderly, quiet woman, thin, somewhat angular, good-humoured and amiable.*

MRS. DOT *is walking up and down impatiently.*

AUNT ELIZA: My dear, why don't you sit down and rest yourself? I'm sure you've walked at least ten miles up and down this terrace.

MRS. DOT: I'm in a temper.

AUNT ELIZA: That must be obvious to the meanest intelligence.

MRS. DOT: Have you read the paper to-day?

AUNT ELIZA: I've tried to, but as you've spent most of the morning stamping on it, I haven't had much success.

MRS. DOT: Then I beg you to listen to this: [*Taking up a "Morning Post" and reading it.*] A marriage has been arranged between Lord Hollington and Eleanor, only daughter of the late General Sir Robert Sellenger.

[She crumples up the paper.]

AUNT ELIZA: That's the twenty-third time you've read this announcement to me. I assure you that it's beginning to lose its novelty.

MRS. DOT: You can't deny that it's rather annoying to take up your paper in the morning and discover an official announcement that the man you've made up your mind to marry is taking serious steps to marry somebody else.

AUNT ELIZA: But would you tell me why you want to marry him?

MRS. DOT: Why does anybody ever want to marry anybody?

AUNT ELIZA: That is a question to which during the fifty-five years of my life I've been totally unable to discover an answer.

MRS. DOT: Well, because he's clever, and handsome, and amusing.

AUNT ELIZA: He's not really very clever, you know.

MRS. DOT: Of course he isn't. He's as stupid as an owl. I've told him so till I'm blue in the face.

AUNT ELIZA: And he's not really very good-looking, is he?

MRS. DOT: On the contrary, I think he's rather plain.

AUNT ELIZA: I suppose you find him amusing?

MRS. DOT: Not at all. I find him dull.

AUNT ELIZA: Then, perhaps, you can find me some other explanation.

MRS. DOT: Well, I'm head over ears in love with him.

AUNT ELIZA: But why, my dear? Why?

MRS. DOT: Because I am. That's the most conclusive reason possible. And I've set my heart on marrying him. And the more obstacles there are the more I mean to marry him.

AUNT ELIZA: I can't imagine why you hadn't the sense to fall in love with one of the various eligible persons who want to marry you.

MRS. DOT: But he *does* want to marry me. He's desperately in love with me.

AUNT ELIZA: I should have thought he could find a better way of showing it than by getting engaged to somebody else.

MRS. DOT: He's a sentimentalist, like all his sex. Good heavens, what a mess the world would get into if it

weren't for the practical common sense of the average women.

AUNT ELIZA: And what do you propose to do?

MRS. DOT: That's just it. I don't in the least know. They'll all be here in half an hour, and I haven't the shadow of a scheme. I lie awake all night racking my brains, and I can't think of anything.

AUNT ELIZA: Why did you ask them to come here?

MRS. DOT: I thought I might hit upon something if they were under my eyes. Gerald had promised to spend Whitsun with me, and so that he shouldn't put me off, I asked the Sellengers, too. Lady Sellenger was only too glad to get a week's board and lodging for nothing. [*The sound is heard of a motor stopping.*] There's Jimmie Blenkinsop. I told you he was going to motor down in time for luncheon, didn't I? [BLENKINSOP comes in with FREDDIE. FREDDIE has on a gay tweed suit.] Jimmie!

BLENKINSOP: How d'you do?

[*He shakes hands with MRS. DOT and AUNT ELIZA.*

MRS. DOT: Now we'll have luncheon. You must be starving with hunger.

BLENKINSOP: You must let me wash first.

MRS. DOT: No, we're all far too hungry. Freddie will go and wash his hands for you.

[*She rings half a dozen times quickly on a little bell on the table.*

FREDDIE: I shall be back in one minute. [*He goes out.*

MRS. DOT: Now sit down. I'm perfectly ravenous.

[*THE BUTLER and the FOOTMAN bring in luncheon, which is eaten during the next scene.*

AUNT ELIZA: I perceive that the tender passion hasn't in the least interfered with your appetite.

MRS. DOT: Oh, my dear James, I'm so unhappy.

BLENKINSOP: You look it.

MRS. DOT: By the way, how do I look?

BLENKINSOP: All right. You've changed your cook.

MRS. DOT: Hang my cook.

BLENKINSOP: I wouldn't if I were you. She's very good.

MRS. DOT: Of course you'll drink the family ale?

BLENKINSOP: Of course I'll do nothing of the kind.

MRS. DOT: You know it's one of my principles to have it on the table.

BLENKINSOP: Yes, but it's one of my principles not to drink it. I seem to remember that you have some particularly fine hock.

MRS. DOT: Jimmie, have you never been in love?

BLENKINSOP: Never, thank God.

MRS. DOT: I don't believe it. Every one's in love. I'm in love.

BLENKINSOP: Not with me, I trust.

MRS. DOT: You perfect idiot.

BLENKINSOP: Not at all. I should think it very natural.

MRS. DOT: I wonder why you never married, James.

BLENKINSOP: Because I have a considerable gift for repartee I discovered in my early youth that men propose not because they want to marry, but because on certain occasions they are entirely at a loss for topics of conversation.

AUNT ELIZA: [*Smiling.*] It was a momentous discovery.

BLENKINSOP: No sooner had I made it than I began to cultivate my power of small talk. I felt that my only chance was to be ready with appropriate subjects at the shortest notice, and I spent a considerable part of my last year at Oxford in studying the best masters.

MRS. DOT: I never noticed that you were particularly brilliant.

BLENKINSOP: I never played for brilliancy. I played for safety. I flatter myself that when prattle was needed I have never been found wanting. I have met the ingenuity of sweet seventeen with a few observations on Free Trade, while the haggard efforts of thirty have struggled in vain against a brief exposition of the higher philosophy. The skittish widow of uncertain age has retired in disorder before a complete acquaintance with the restoration dramatists, and I have routed the serious spinster with religious leanings by my remarkable knowledge of the results of missionary endeavour in Central Africa. Once a dowager sought to ask me my intentions, but I flung at her astonished head an entire article from the Encyclopædia Britannica. These are only my serious efforts. I need not tell you how often I have evaded a flash of the eyes by an epigram or ignored a sigh by an apt quotation from the poets.

MRS. DOT: I don't believe a word you say. I believe you never married for the simple reason that nobody would have you.

BLENKINSOP: Do me the justice to acknowledge that I'm the only man who's known you ten days without being tempted by your preposterous income to offer you his hand and heart.

MRS. DOT: I don't believe my income has anything to do with it. I put it down entirely to my very considerable personal attractions.

AUNT ELIZA: Here is Freddie, at last. What has he been doing?

[FREDDIE comes in, having changed into flannels.

MRS. DOT: Why on earth have you changed your clothes?

FREDDIE: [*Sitting down at table.*] I regard it as part of my duties as your secretary to look nice.

MRS. DOT: I don't know that I think it essential for you to put on seven different suits a day.

FREDDIE: I thought Miss Scellenger would probably like to go on the river before tea.

AUNT ELIZA: If she does, it's more likely to be with Lord Hollington than with you.

FREDDIE: Oh, that's rot. Gerald's an awfully good sort, but he's not the sort of chap a girl's desperately fond of.

MRS. DOT: You think that, do you?

FREDDIE: Well, you can't see yourself falling in love with him, can you?

MRS. DOT: No. No.

AUNT ELIZA: And what is the sort of man a girl's desperately fond of?

FREDDIE: Oh, I don't know. [*Taking up a spoon and looking at himself, twisting an infinitesimal moustache.*] I should think some one a bit younger than Gerald.

MRS. DOT: [*With a little shriek.*] You!

FREDDIE: You needn't be so surprised. One might do worse, you know.

MRS. DOT: [*To AUNT ELIZA pointing with a scornful finger at FREDDIE.*] Do you think any one could possibly fall in love with that?

AUNT ELIZA: Of course not.

FREDDIE: I say, come now. That's a bit thick.

MRS. DOT: [*To BLENKINSOP.*] If you were a young and lovely maiden would you fall in love with Freddie?

BLENKINSOP: [*Looking at him doubtfully.*] Well, if you ask me point blank I don't think I should.

FREDDIE: You're all of you jolly supercilious.

MRS. DOT: He's not positively plain, is he?

BLENKINSOP: Not positively.

FREDDIE: Look here, you shut up. I bet I could cut you out with any girl you like to mention.

BLENKINSOP: Rubbish!

MRS. DOT: I daresay he can whisper nonsense in a woman's ear as well as any one else.

AUNT ELIZA: It's born in them, the brutes.

BLINKINSOP: Pooh! I wouldn't waste my time on whispering nonsense. I'd just send my pass-book round by a messenger boy.

FREDDIE: Well, I flatter myself Miss Sellenger will be much more pleased to see *me* than to see anybody else down here.

BLINKINSOP: You've only seen her once.

FREDDIE: She's a jolly nice girl, I can tell you that.

BLINKINSOP: [*Ironically.*] I suppose she squeezed your hand when you went away?

FREDDIE: Well, it so happens, she did.

BLINKINSOP: You needn't be set up about it, because she squeezed mine, too. It's evidently a habit.

FREDDIE: Yours! What rot!

[*MRS. DOT has been staring at him, with both elbows on the table. A servant is standing at her side with a tray on which is the coffee.*]

AUNT ELIZA: Thompson is offering you some coffee, my dear.

MRS. DOT: [*Absently.*] Take it away.

FREDDIE: What on earth are you staring at? Isn't my tie all right?

MRS. DOT: You certainly are rather good-looking. I've never noticed it before.

FREDDIE: It's no good, you know. You're my aunt, and the prayer book wouldn't let you marry me.

MRS. DOT: Now I come to think of it, I daresay you're quite grown up to any one who didn't know you in Etons.

FREDDIE: I don't know what on earth you're talking about.

MRS. DOT: I suppose a girl might quite easily fall in love with you. It had never occurred to me.

BLENKINSOP: Which means that you've found him a wife, and you're going to marry him to some one whether he likes it or not.

MRS. DOT: [*Suddenly.*] Freddie.

FREDDIE: Hulloo!

MRS. DOT: Go away and play.

FREDDIE: Hang it all, I want to drink my coffee.

MRS. DOT: Go and make a mud pie in the garden. There's a dear. [*A bell is heard ringing loudly.*]

AUNT ELIZA: There they are!

MRS. DOT: Come on!

[*They all get up. MRS. DOT and AUNT ELIZA go out. FREDDIE and BLENKINSOP light cigarettes.*]

FREDDIE: What's the matter with my virtuous aunt?

BLENKINSOP: How old are you, dear boy?

FREDDIE: Twenty-two. Why?

BLENKINSOP: The delightful age when it's still possible to feel desperately wicked. But you are old enough to have learnt that the moods of women are inscrutable.

FREDDIE: Oh, rot! I never met a woman whom I couldn't read at a glance.

BLENKINSOP: [*Ironically.*] Really?

FREDDIE: You know, they talk about the incomprehensibility of women, but it's all humbug.

BLENKINSOP: When you see a blank wall, does it *ever* occur to you that there's anything on the other side?

[*MRS. DOT and AUNT ELIZA come in with LADY SELLENGER, NELLIE and HOLLINGTON. They are all talking.*]

LADY SELLENGER: We had a delightful journey. Oh, how beautiful your garden is! So romantic. I love romance

BLENKINSOP: When it's backed by an adequate income.

LADY SELLENGER: How d'you do. You cynic.

BLENKINSOP: I'm nothing of the sort. But I occasionally tell the truth.

LADY SELLENGER: You're the most cynical man in London, and I'm frightened to death of you.

BLENKINSOP: There's nothing the world loves more than a ready-made description which they can hang on to a man, and so save themselves all trouble in future. When I was quite young it occurred to some one that I was a cynic, and since then I've never been able to remark that it was a fine day without being accused of odious cynicism.

LADY SELLENGER: My dear Mr. Blenkinsop, what every one says is always true. That is one of the foundations of society.

BLENKINSOP: I gained my reputation by remarking once that it was possible for a penniless young man who married a very rich woman old enough to be his mother to be genuinely in love with her.

LADY SELLENGER: I think it was a very cynical observation.

MRS. DOT: [*To LADY SELLENGER.*] You know my nephew, don't you?

LADY SELLENGER: How d'you do? I think we met at dear Gerald's a week or two ago.

FREDDIE: [*Shaking hands.*] How d'you do? [*To NELLIE.*] Have you quite forgotten me?

NELLIE: Not quite!

FREDDIE: Jolly day, isn't it?

NELLIE: Awfully jolly.

[*MRS. DOT watches them as they shake hands*]

AUNT ELIZA: [*To LADY SELLENGER.*] Would you like me to show you your rooms?

LADY SELLENGER: Thanks, so much.

MRS. DOT: Freddie, is Gerald's room ready?

FREDDIE: Yes, I think so. I'll just go and find out.

[*He goes out.*]

MRS. DOT: I was so delighted to see the announcement in the morning's paper. I offer my very warmest congratulations.

NELLIE: Thanks, so much.

MRS. DOT: I've known Gerald for ages. I'm delighted to see him on the way to such a happy marriage. I couldn't have wished him to get engaged to any one nicer than you.

LADY SELLENGER: It's all so romantic, isn't it? It ought to be an answer to a cynical creature like you to see the course of true love run so smoothly.

MRS. DOT: [*To GERALD.*] I offer you also my best congratulations. I think you're very lucky.

GERALD: [*Stiffly.*] Thank you, very much. I suppose I have my usual room?

MRS. DOT: Yes.

[*He goes into the house. LADY SELLENGER and NELLIE accompany AUNT ELIZA. MRS. DOT is left alone with BLENKINSOP.*]

MRS. DOT: James!

BLENKINSOP: Hullo!

MRS. DOT: Do you love me?

BLENKINSOP: Passionately.

MRS. DOT: [*Stamping her foot.*] Don't be so silly.

BLENKINSOP: You can't expect me to be so uncivil as to say no.

MRS. DOT: But I'm perfectly serious.

BLENKINSOP: Are you, by Jove? That alters the matter. In that case the answer is in the negative.

MRS. DOT: And is there the least chance of your falling in love with me?

BLINKINSOP: Not so long as I remain in full possession of my senses.

MRS. DOT: Do you want to marry me?

BLINKINSOP: Really you embarrass me very much.

MRS. DOT: Don't hedge.

BLINKINSOP: It's a little disconcerting to have a pistol put to your head in the form of a proposal of marriage.

MRS. DOT: I'm not making you a proposal of marriage, idiot.

BLINKINSOP: Then I should very much like to know what you are doing.

MRS. DOT: I'm asking you a very simple and ordinary question.

BLINKINSOP: Thank God, it's not one that women ask often.

MRS. DOT: I never saw any one out of whom it's harder to get a straight answer.

BLINKINSOP: You must make allowances for a pardonable agitation.

MRS. DOT: James, do you want to marry me?

BLINKINSOP: No, bless you!

MRS. DOT: Are you quite sure?

BLINKINSOP: Positive.

MRS. DOT: Would nothing induce you to marry me?

BLINKINSOP: Nothing.

MRS. DOT: [*With a sigh of relief.*] Then you may kiss my hand.

BLINKINSOP: [*Doing so.*] You're not hurt?

MRS. DOT: I'm infinitely relieved.

BLINKINSOP: And Freddie, the dear boy, says he can read a woman at a glance.

MRS. DOT: Now listen to me quite seriously. I want you to do something for me.

BLINKINSOP: [*Nervously.*] We've put marriage out of the question, haven't we?

MRS. DOT: Certainly.

BLINKINSOP: [*Generously.*] You may ask anything else of me.

MRS. DOT: I want you to let me make love to you.

BLINKINSOP: My dear friend, this is very surprising.

MRS. DOT: There are people who'd welcome the proposal with alacrity.

BLINKINSOP: For how long?

MRS. DOT: Only for a week.

BLINKINSOP: You're sure it's not in earnest?

MRS. DOT: Quite sure.

BLINKINSOP: And what have I got to do?

MRS. DOT: Well, you've got to look as if you liked it.

BLINKINSOP: [*Sombrely.*] Of course, it sounds very delightful.

MRS. DOT: You must show a coming-on disposition, you know, or I can do nothing.

BLINKINSOP: Do you want me to make love to *you*?

MRS. DOT: I'm afraid it's asking a great deal of you.

BLINKINSOP: Not at all. Not at all. But I wish you'd tell me what your little game is.

MRS. DOT: Ah, here's Aunt Eliza. The very person I wanted. [*AUNT ELIZA comes on to the terrace from the house. Impulsively.*] Aunt Eliza, will you be a perfect brick? Will you do something for me that's an awful nuisance?

AUNT ELIZA: My dear, why on earth are you so excited? Of course I'll do anything in reason for you.

MRS. DOT: But it's not in reason.

AUNT ELIZA: Well, I'll do it all the same.

MRS. DOT: I want you to take a motor and bolt up to London and get a special licence.

AUNT ELIZA: A special licence!

BLINKINSOP: A special licence!

MRS. DOT: [*Catching sight of his face.*] Get two special licences. They're always useful things to have in a house.

AUNT ELIZA: But they must be made out to certain names.

MRS. DOT: Must they? How stupid! Well, have one made out for Frederick Perkins and Eleanor Sellenger.

AUNT ELIZA: My dear child, you must be crazy.

MRS. DOT: Now don't argue, but do as I tell you. If two young things are thrown together with a certain amount of skill they always marry.

AUNT ELIZA: But they hardly know one another.

MRS. DOT: If people waited to know one another before they married, the world wouldn't be so grossly over-populated as it is now.

AUNT ELIZA: You're certainly quite crazy.

MRS. DOT: No, I'm not. I shall never get Gerald to break his word. My only chance is with Nellie.

BLENKINSOP: [*Uneasily.*] But you've told her to get two licences.

MRS. DOT: Make the second one out in the names of James Blenkinsop and Frances Annandale Worthley.

BLENKINSOP: I absolutely refuse.

MRS. DOT: But you must let me. You can't leave an old friend in the lurch.

BLENKINSOP: It's all very fine to invoke the claims of friendship, but it's carrying it rather far when you pay three guineas for a special licence.

MRS. DOT: My dear man, I can't drag you to the altar.

BLENKINSOP: I'm beginning to think you're capable of anything.

MRS. DOT: But don't you see, you idiot, that I want to marry Gerald Hollington? And I'm eating my heart out.

BLENKINSOP: [*Crossly.*] It's evidently a diet that agrees with you. You're growing fat on it.

MRS. DOT: Don't be spiteful. I've not gained half a pound in the last five years.

AUNT ELIZA: And how on earth are you going to get Freddie and Nellie Sellenger to use this licence?

MRS. DOT: Never mind, leave everything to me. And make haste to get up to London.

AUNT ELIZA: Very well, I'll go at once.

[Just as AUNT ELIZA is going into the house LADY SELLENGER comes out, followed by NELLIE; AUNT ELIZA stops and listens to the conversation from the doorway.]

MRS. DOT: I hope you've found everything you wanted.

LADY SELLENGER: Oh, yes, thanks. I'm quite delighted with the view from my room.

MRS. DOT: Come and sit down. I have something very serious I want to talk to you about.

LADY SELLENGER: Dear Mr. Blenkinsop, do take Nellie for a little stroll in the garden.

MRS. DOT: Oh, but it concerns Nellie, and I want her to hear.

BLENKINSOP: I perceive you are inclined to think that the serious cannot fail to be improper, Lady Sellenger.

LADY SELLENGER: Be quiet, you horrible cynic.

MRS. DOT: Well, a most ridiculous thing has happened, and I want Nellie to help me.

NELLIE: Me?

MRS. DOT: My dear, it's so unfortunate, but my nephew has fallen head over ears in love with you.

NELLIE: Nonsense!

MRS. DOT: I can't understand it. After all, he's only seen you once, and you can't have exchanged more than a dozen words.

LADY SELLENGER: How very annoying!

MRS. DOT: And it's so unexpected, because he's not at all the sort of boy who falls in and out of love with every pretty girl he meets. I think you're his first passion, and he's inclined to take it very seriously.

LADY SELLENGER: Poor boy, I can afford to sympathise with him now that Nellie is safely engaged to Gerald Hollington.

NELLIE: It's really rather flattering, isn't it? But how on earth d'you know?

MRS. DOT: He tells me everything. You see, I've always tried to be his friend as well as his aunt. He has no secrets from me.

BLENKINSOP: You'll tell us next that a boy who's been to Eton and Oxford has a pure and innocent mind.

MRS. DOT: My dear child, he simply raves about you. He's been talking of nothing else ever since you met.

LADY SELLENGER: But doesn't he know that Nellie is going to be married at the end of the season?

MRS. DOT: Of course, he does. I've dinned it into his ears, but it seems to have no effect on him. He's the sort of lover that will hear of no obstacles. It's really quite pathetic to hear the passionate harangues that he pours into my ears.

NELLIE: What sort of things does he say?

MRS. DOT: My dear, I suppose very much the same as Gerald.

NELLIE: No one could accuse Gerald of being a passionate lover.

MRS. DOT: Really?

LADY SELLENGER: I'm very glad he's not. He's going to be your husband, and that's more satisfactory than any amount of pretty speeches.

NELLIE: I could wish that he talked to me of something besides the weather and the Royal Academy.

LADY SELLENGER: My dear child, what are you saying? Gerald has a charming nature and the very highest principles.

BLENKINSOP: [*Imitating her pompous manner.*] To say nothing of a peerage and a considerable income.

MRS. DOT: He certainly has every advantage over poor Freddie, who is nobody in particular and hasn't a penny to bless himself with.

NELLIE: I think he's awfully nice.

MRS. DOT: Well, that's just what I don't want you to think. I shouldn't have said anything to you about his—mad infatuation, only I want you to be very careful.

LADY SELLENGER: Of course. It's quite natural.

NELLIE: What do you want me to do?

MRS. DOT: Well, I want you to be very good and sweet and help me to cure him. I'd send him away, only it would have no effect. I thought if he saw you again he might find out that you have at least one or two faults. At present he thinks you too perfect for words.

NELLIE: I'm not that, really.

MRS. DOT: I didn't think you were. I want you to promise that you'll do nothing that he can in the least take as encouragement. I want you to be very distant and very cold.

NELLIE: Of course, I'll be only too glad to do anything I can.

MRS. DOT: You'd be doing him a real kindness if you could snub him at every opportunity. Then you must avoid him as much as you can. Of course, you'll be very much with Gerald while you're down here.

LADY SELLENGER: Of course. The dears, they've not seen one another for a year, and they have an infinity of things to discuss.

MRS. DOT: It'll be quite easy for you to show my poor

Freddie that he's only making a prodigious fool of himself.

NELLIE: I feel so sorry for him.

MRS. DOT: You will do what you can, won't you?

NELLIE: I'll make it quite plain to him at once that he mustn't care for me.

MRS. DOT: Treat it as an impertinence that you resent.

NELLIE: All right.

MRS. DOT: I know you have the sweetest nature in the world, but if you could be really brutal to him at once, it would cure him instantly.

NELLIE: I can be horrid when I like.

MRS. DOT: I'm sure you can. I put infinite reliance in your tact.

LADY SELLENGER: And now I think we really might take a little turn in the garden before tea. [*Seeing that NELLIE, instead of accompanying her, strolls towards the house.*] Where are you going, Nellie?

NELLIE: [*Stopping.*] I've just remembered I must write a letter. I'll join you in five minutes.

LADY SELLENGER: [*To BLENKINSOP and Mrs. Dot, who are getting up.*] Oh, don't let me disturb you, I shall enjoy wandering about and looking at the flowers by myself.

[*She goes away. Just as NELLIE is entering the house FREDDIE comes out. She gives him a glance and as she passes, drops a rose. FREDDIE picks it up and comes forward.*]

MRS. DOT: You monster!

FREDDIE: What's the matter?

MRS. DOT: Give me that flower!

FREDDIE: I shall do nothing of the sort. I shall put it in my button-hole.

MRS. DOT: Freddie, I've come to the conclusion that you

want a holiday. I wish you to pack up your things at once and go to Brighton for a week. You're looking pale and tired. I'm sure you've been working too hard.

FREDDIE: Oh, rot! I'm as fit as a fiddle.

MRS. DOT: Don't you agree with me, James?

BLENKINSOP: Certainly. I think a change of air is distinctly indicated.

FREDDIE: But I can't go away when you've got people in the house. Besides, who's to look after your correspondence?

MRS. DOT: My dear boy, your health is the chief thing. I should never forgive myself if you came to any harm while you were my secretary. I'll write my letters myself.

BLENKINSOP: Besides, I shall be here, and I'll do all I can to help you.

FREDDIE: I don't believe I'm pale.

MRS. DOT: You only have to look at yourself.

[She takes out a little pocket mirror and hands it to him.]

BLENKINSOP: Let's look at your tongue. *[He puts it out.]*
Tut, tut, tut!

FREDDIE: Look here, there's something behind this.

BLENKINSOP: You're too clever, my boy.

FREDDIE: I see through your little game. Aunt Dot, you want to get rid of me.

MRS. DOT: How can you be so absurd?

FREDDIE: Now, I wonder what your reason is.

MRS. DOT: Shall we tell him the truth?

BLENKINSOP: Yes, perhaps you'd better. He's a very bright boy.

MRS. DOT: Well, the fact is, Freddie, a dreadful thing has happened. Poor Nellie Sellenger is desperately in love with you.

FREDDIE: I don't see why you should want me to go away on that account.

BLINKINSOP: Good lord, man, don't be so self-satisfied. Aren't you surprised, aren't you dumbfounded that a pretty girl should fall in love with you?

FREDDIE: I thought it meant something when she dropped that rose.

BLINKINSOP: Bless my stars, the dolt takes it as a matter of course.

FREDDIE: I'm awfully flattered and all that sort of thing.

MRS. DOT: But not exactly surprised?

FREDDIE: It's not fair to ask a fellow a question like that.

BLINKINSOP: At all events, you see now the necessity for depriving us for a time of your charming society.

FREDDIE: Nothing will induce me to desert a post of danger. I'm going to face the music.

BLINKINSOP: Don't be such an ass. It's not you we're thinking of, it's that unfortunate girl.

FREDDIE: I don't know why you think she's unfortunate.

MRS. DOT: But, my dear boy, she's engaged to Gerald Hollington. Don't you see how serious the whole thing is? The only chance is for you to go away. We must try and make her forget you.

FREDDIE: I don't want to do anybody a bad turn. I wouldn't do anything to queer Gerald's pitch for worlds.

BLINKINSOP: You must combine with us in order to save her from herself.

MRS. DOT: There's no use in her eating her heart out for you, when she must inevitably marry Gerald.

FREDDIE: Poor old Gerald, I told you he wasn't the sort of chap a girl would be desperately in love with.

BLINKINSOP: The acumen you have shown does credit to your years.

FREDDIE: Still, you know, I don't think it's wise for me to go away. Don't you think it would be rather marked? And they always say that absence makes the heart grow fonder.

BLINKINSOP: It was a woman who invented that proverb. There's no truth in it.

MRS. DOT: What else can you suggest? The fact remains that Nellie must be cured of this—of this passion.

FREDDIE: My own idea is that the best thing is for me to hang on here as if I knew nothing about it. I'll take care to be very distant. I'll ignore her as much as I can.

MRS. DOT: Will you promise to do that?

FREDDIE: Yes, rather. I'll let her see that I'm really a deuced dissipated dog.

BLINKINSOP: Don't let her think you're too great a devil with the ladies, or that'll be the last straw. If there's one thing a woman likes it's a really bad man. She'll start reforming you, and then there'll be no holding her back.

MRS. DOT: No, you must seem rather dull and stupid. Let her think you're a bit of a milksop.

[FREDDIE looks at them suspiciously.]

FREDDIE: Look here, you're not pulling my leg all the time, are you?

MRS. DOT: My dear, I should never take such a liberty.

FREDDIE: I don't believe a word of what you've told me. Why should she care for me? You've simply been humbugging me right and left.

[For a moment MRS. DOT is taken aback, but she sees LADY SELLENGER coming through the garden with GERALD.]

MRS. DOT: Here's Lady Sellenger. You won't accuse her of trying to make a fool of you. [LADY SELLENGER and GERALD appear.] I've just been talking to Freddie about—about your girl.

LADY SELLENGER: Oh yes. [*To FREDDIE.*] My poor boy, you're in a very difficult position.

FREDDIE: *Then you know all about it, too?*

LADY SELLENGER: I really feel for you very much. You'll want a great deal of tact and a great deal of courage. But you must do your duty.

[*She turns aside to BLENKINSOP.*]

MRS. DOT: [*In an undertone to FREDDIE.*] Now have I been pulling your leg?

FREDDIE: Poor girl! [*He goes into the house.*]

LADY SELLENGER: [*Looking at him as he goes.*] What a beautiful and touching thing love is.

BLENKINSOP: You must take care, Lady Sellenger. You're growing sentimental.

LADY SELLENGER: But I've always been as sentimental as a schoolgirl in my heart. Only, so long as Nellie's future was unarranged, I was obliged to keep a tight hand on myself.

MRS. DOT: Of course, Jimmie laughs; he doesn't know what love is.

LADY SELLENGER: Have you never been loved for yourself, Mr. Blenkinsop?

BLENKINSOP: I have, but I have always found it deuced expensive.

GERALD: I'm afraid Blenkinsop doesn't set much store on the gentle sex.

BLENKINSOP: Don't call them gentle. They're very much rougher than men.

MRS. DOT: Stop him, or he'll utter a whole string of horrors.

BLENKINSOP: Have you never watched the gentle sex fight and push and scramble as it gets into the Hammersmith bus? I assure you, the unlucky man who finds himself in that seething feminine crowd is fortunate if he escapes

without losing an eye or half his teeth. And have you seen the fury of the gentle sex at a sale as they seize some worthless fragment, and the bitterness with which they haggle? The other day I was in the Army and Navy Stores, and two women were standing on the stairs, discussing their servants, so that no one could pass up and down. I took off my hat and said: Excuse me, would you allow me to pass. They moved barely two inches, and one of them said in a loud voice to the other: What an impertinent man. The gentle sex! Yesterday I was hanging on a strap in a crowded train coming from the city, and I saw a pale-faced weary clerk give up his seat to a strong and bouncing girl. She took it without saying thank you, because she was a lady and he wasn't a gentleman. Then a tired old woman came in and stood, but the bouncing girl never thought of giving up the seat to her. The gentle sex! They have such tender hearts they couldn't bear to hurt a fly. Have you ever seen a woman get out of a bus ten yards before her destination in order to save the wretched horses another start? Not much. Have you ever known a woman of fashion who sends her maid to bed when she knows she won't be in till four in the morning? Not much. And is there anything like the insolence with which a woman treats her social inferiors of the same sex? Is it men who put on their backs the sealskins that are torn off the living bodies of helpless brutes? Is it men who put on their hats the beautiful birds of the forest? It's the gentle sex. Boys are taught manners. They are taught to take off their hats and hold open the door for their sisters. They are taught to fetch and carry for women, and to give up the front seat in life to women. But what are girls taught? Girls are taught etiquette, and that, I suppose, makes them in due course the gentle sex.

LADY SELLENGER: Everyone knows you're a horrible cynic, so there can't be a word of truth in anything you say.

BLENKINSOP: Q.E.D.

GERALD: Here comes Nellie.

[*NELLIE comes in, having changed her dress. She now wears a very pretty white frock, all flounces and furbelows, and a large white hat. At the same moment from the other side FREDDIE enters. He also has changed, and is now in spotless white.*

MRS. DOT: [*With a laugh, whispering to BLENKINSOP.*] They've both changed their clothes.

GERALD: Would you like to come for a row, Nellie?

NELLIE: I'm too tired. Won't you go with Mrs. Dot? I'll rest here till tea-time.

[*NELLIE sits down, and the others go.*

LADY SELLENGER: Personally, I must walk. I sacrifice all my inclinations to my fear of growing too stout. I often wonder if we shall get our good dinners in heaven that we've done without on earth.

BLENKINSOP: It's generally understood that we shall only get our deserts.

[*NELLIE watches them go from over her shoulder. She sees that FREDDIE is hanging back. She smiles and elaborately disregards him. He comes forward and leans over her chair.*

NELLIE: Aren't you going with the others?

FREDDIE: Do you mind if I stay with you?

NELLIE: I like it.

FREDDIE: Jolly here, isn't it?

NELLIE: Awfully jolly.

FREDDIE: I've not congratulated you on your engagement yet.

NELLIE: I didn't expect you would.

FREDDIE: Why?

NELLIE: Oh, I don't know.

FREDDIE: It seems a long time since we first met, doesn't it?

NELLIE: Why?

FREDDIE: Because I seem to know you so well.

NELLIE: You're very easy to get to know, aren't you?

FREDDIE: I say, you look just like another rose in this garden.

NELLIE: I suppose you say that to every girl who sits here?

FREDDIE: I've never said it to anyone but you.

NELLIE: They tell me you're very impressionable.

FREDDIE: They lie.

NELLIE: I think I shall take off my hat.

FREDDIE: Yes, do.

[She proceeds to do so. She pretends that she cannot.]

NELLIE: Oh, how stupid of me! Something has caught.

FREDDIE: May I help you?

NELLIE: I'm afraid I'm giving you a lot of trouble.

[He helps her, and she gives a little scream.]

FREDDIE: Oh, I'm so sorry. Did I hurt you?

NELLIE: No, but it tickled.

[She takes off the hat. One hand of hers remains in his. Their eyes meet for the first time, and they smile.]

FREDDIE: I say, what a pretty hand you have! It looks so white on mine, doesn't it?

[Mrs. Dot creeps back and stands behind a bush, so that she cannot be seen.]

NELLIE: I rather like your hand. It's so strong and brown.

FREDDIE: You know, you're awfully easy to get on with. Sometimes I feel dreadfully shy and nervous with women, but I can think of all sorts of things I want to say to you.

NELLIE: I seem to have known you all my life.

FREDDIE: [*Impulsively.*] Isn't it jolly here?

NELLIE: Awfully jolly.

[*He looks at her for a moment.*]

FREDDIE: I want to ask you something. You won't be angry, will you?

NELLIE: No.

FREDDIE: May I kiss you?

NELLIE: No.

FREDDIE: It's awfully unkind of you.

NELLIE: You shouldn't have asked.

FREDDIE: Shouldn't I? I wanted to, badly.

NELLIE: There are some things one should do without asking.

FREDDIE: You are a brick.

[*He kisses her. As he does so, HOLLINGTON comes in and sees them. He stops for a moment in astonishment, then withdraws.*]

FREDDIE: Let's go on the river, shall we?

NELLIE: I told Gerald I was too tired.

FREDDIE: Oh, hang Gerald!

NELLIE: We might go and play the piano in the drawing-room.

FREDDIE: I'm awfully fond of music. Cake-walks, and things like that, you know.

[*They get up. MRS. DOT comes forward.*]

MRS. DOT: Are you going? I thought you were tired.

NELLIE: We're just going to look at the kitchen garden.

FREDDIE: I've told Miss Sellenger that you've got some most awfully good carrots.

MRS. DOT: [*As they go to the house.*] That's not the way, you know.

NELLIE: [*Coolly.*] I'm only just going to get a handkerchief.

MRS. DOT: Oh, I see. I beg your pardon.

[*They go. GERALD comes forward. He is rather grave and solemn.*]

MRS. DOT: What a picture they make, don't they? I can't tell you how much I like Nellie.

GERALD: You've come to the conclusion that the cut of her skirt's all right.

MRS. DOT: Ah, you mustn't recall what I said when I was in a temper. You know, I'm rather touched by her obvious affection for you.

GERALD: It's very good of you to say so.

MRS. DOT: It's so nice to see two people head over ears in love with one another.

GERALD: I wouldn't be so presumptuous as to think Nellie was so much in love with me as all that.

MRS. DOT: My dear boy, I've just had proof of it.

GERALD: Have you? That's more than I have.

MRS. DOT: And is dear Lady Sellenger going to live with you when you're married?

GERALD: Look here, Dot, what's the meaning of all this?

MRS. DOT: [*Much surprised.*] Of what?

GERALD: Why did you ask us all down?

MRS. DOT: Because I'm of a hospitable turn of mind. Didn't you want to come? I'm so sorry.

GERALD: You've utterly ignored me since I arrived.

MRS. DOT: [*Ironically.*] Much as I should have liked to devote myself exclusively to your entertainment, I've been really obliged to remember that my other guests had equal claims upon me.

GERALD: I should very much like to take you by the shoulders and give you a good shaking.

MRS. DOT: I don't think you're in a very good temper to-day.

GERALD: [*Crossly.*] Pardon me, I'm in the best possible temper.

MRS. DOT: You certainly ought to be with the prospect of spending a week in almost uninterrupted *fête-à-fête* with the object of your affections.

GERALD: I can't make you out. You're so changed since last we met.

MRS. DOT: You see, last time I thought I was in love with you. Now I know I'm not.

GERALD: [*Bitterly.*] I'm glad you've got over it so quickly.

MRS. DOT: Really, you couldn't wish me to continue eating my heart out for a young man, however charming, who is going to marry somebody else.

GERALD: Of course not.

MRS. DOT: [*Mockingly.*] Well?

GERALD: I was a fool to think you ever cared at all.

MRS. DOT: But why should you think it when you took the greatest pains to assure me that you didn't care two straws for me?

GERALD: [*Quickly.*] I didn't!

MRS. DOT: You did!

GERALD: I didn't!

MRS. DOT: Then you did care for me?

GERALD: I never said that.

MRS. DOT: Anyhow, whatever your sentiments were, it would gratify your self-esteem to think that I was languishing with a hopeless passion.

GERALD: It's cruel of you to laugh at me.

MRS. DOT: By the way, are you by any chance in love with me now?

GERALD: You have no right to ask me that question.

MRS. DOT: My dear boy, I'm not keeping you from spending an idyllic afternoon with Nellie. You've forced this conversation upon me. I assure you it's most distasteful.

GERALD: If I had married you, I should certainly have beaten you with a big stick.

MRS. DOT: What do you think is my chief characteristic?

GERALD: That's a question I *can* answer. The most confounded and aggravating unreasonableness that I ever saw.

MRS. DOT: Nonsense. It's obvious that my chief characteristic is a sweet and yielding nature. But as there's no likelihood of our agreeing on that, what do you think is the second?

GERALD: Obstinacy.

MRS. DOT: Well, I prefer to call it strength of mind. Now, I'll acknowledge that I was in love with you—a month ago. That's a feather in your cap.

GERALD: Oh, I wish we were back again. I've had such rotten luck.

MRS. DOT: But when I saw that my sweetness was likely to be wasted on the desert air, I made up my mind to cure myself. First I cried for two days.

GERALD: Dot.

MRS. DOT: No, don't sympathise. I have rather a high colour, and when I've had a good cry it always improves my complexion. After that, I ordered some new frocks, and I bought a diamond necklace that I'd been hankering after for some time.

GERALD: And that thoroughly consoled you, I suppose?

MRS. DOT: It helped. Then I came to the conclusion that there were as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it. I thought you over. After all, you're not really very good-looking, are you?

GERALD: I'm not aware that I ever made any pretence of being so.

MRS. DOT: And I'm sure no one could accuse you of being extremely amusing.

GERALD: I have no doubt I'm excessively dull.

MRS. DOT: I couldn't help seeing that you'd suit Nellie much better than you would have suited me. She has that comfortable stupidity which the average Englishman looks upon as the highest recommendation for a wife.

GERALD: It's charming of you to say so.

MRS. DOT: She *is* a little dull, isn't she?

GERALD: I don't think her so.

MRS. DOT: Doesn't time hang rather heavily on your hands now and then? Isn't it difficult to find topics of conversation?

GERALD: I don't find it so.

MRS. DOT: Ah—she does.

GERALD: And the long and short of it is that the emotion which you dignify with the name of love, had entirely disappeared after a week.

MRS. DOT: Make it ten days to be on the safe side.

GERALD: I congratulate you.

MRS. DOT: You wouldn't have it otherwise, surely?

GERALD: Of course not.

MRS. DOT: Then all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

GERALD: [*Furiously.*] I think you must be quite heartless.

MRS. DOT: [*Delighted.*] Ah, that's what I said you to a month ago. Philippine.

GERALD: Now, perhaps, you'd like to know what my feeling is towards you?

MRS. DOT: No, I'm quite indifferent, thanks!

GERALD: Well, I shall tell you for all that. It's a joke to you, and you can afford to laugh at it.

[He goes up to her and then stops suddenly.]

MRS. DOT: Well?

GERALD: Nothing.

MRS. DOT: Oh! My poor heart went pit-a-pat. I thought you were going to kiss me.

GERALD: I hate you. And I wish I'd never set eyes on you.

[He turns on his heel and walks out quickly. As soon as he is gone MRS. DOT begins to dance a break-down. She cocks a snook after him.]

MRS. DOT: I'll marry you yet, you beast, I'll marry you yet.

[BLENKINSOP comes in.]

BLENKINSOP: What on earth is the matter with you now?

[From inside is heard the sound of a cake-walk.]

MRS. DOT: Come on.

[She seizes him and begins to dance.]

BLENKINSOP: Unhand me, woman!

MRS. DOT: Oh, you dear, you dear, you dear.

[She flings both arms round his neck and kisses him soundly. At this moment GERALD returns.]

GERALD: I beg your pardon. I forgot my hat.

[He takes it and goes out stiffly. MRS. DOT bursts into a shriek of laughter.]

BLENKINSOP: That's all very fine. But what about my character?

END OF THE SECOND ACT

THE THIRD ACT

A hall in MRS. WORTHLEY'S house on the River.

GERALD and NELLIE are seated in arm-chairs. She stifles a yawn. Then he yawns.

GERALD: I beg your pardon.

NELLIE: [*Yawning.*] I never saw anyone who yawned so much as you.

GERALD: [*Ironically.*] I suppose you've never looked at yourself in the glass?

NELLIE: Is your family very long-lived, Gerald?

GERALD: [*Rather surprised.*] Are you already asking yourself how you'll look in widow's weeds?

NELLIE: You may very well live for forty years, mayn't you?

GERALD: My maternal grandfather survived to plague his descendants to the ripe age of ninety-seven.

NELLIE: How many days are there in forty years?

GERALD: I should think about fifteen thousand.

NELLIE: Has it occurred to you that we may eat fifteen thousand breakfasts sitting opposite one another, and fifteen thousand luncheons, and fifteen thousand dinners?

GERALD: [*Gloomily.*] Yes, it had occurred to me.

NELLIE: And how do you look upon the prospect?

GERALD: [*Grimly.*] It fills me with satisfaction, naturally.

NELLIE: [*Abruptly.*] I suppose you're very much in love with me?

GERALD: What an extraordinary question!

NELLIE: I don't think anyone but a lunatic would describe you as an ardent lover.

GERALD: [*Coldly.*] I regret that my behaviour doesn't meet with your satisfaction.

NELLIE: Do you know that since we became definitely engaged you've never told me that you cared for me?

GERALD: [*Apologetically.*] Yes, I ought to have done that, oughtn't I? I suppose I thought you'd take it for granted.

NELLIE: Every girl likes a suspicion of romance thrown over her love-affairs.

GERALD: Your mother will tell you that the certainty of marriage is much more satisfactory.

NELLIE: [*Dryly.*] You would have made an excellent husband—for mother.

GERALD: Have you noticed that when we *do* think of something to talk about, we get perilously near a squabble?

NELLIE: I sometimes think it would be better to quarrel outright now and then than be always so desperately polite to one another.

GERALD: I'm afraid I have an admirable temper.

NELLIE: Mother always says you have all the virtues.

GERALD: Shall we look at the *Sketch* together?

NELLIE: We've looked at the *Sketch* together three times. [*Following his eye, which goes to other illustrated papers on the table.*] And the *Illustrated*, and the *Sphere*, and the *Graphic*.

GERALD: Then what would you like to do?

NELLIE: I should like to SCREAM.

GERALD: Would you, by George? So would I.

NELLIE: Oh, Gerald, let's have a good scream together.

[*Enter LADY SELLENGER and MRS. DOT.*]

LADY SELLENGER: [*With a bland smile.*] What a picture they make!

MRS. DOT: [*Acidly.*] It's quite charming to see two young things so engrossed in one another's society.

LADY SELLENGER: Now, you really mustn't waste this beautiful afternoon. You must go and have a nice long walk together.

NELLIE: We had a nice long walk this morning.

MRS. DOT: [*Sweetly.*] Then why don't you go on the river? You can take your tea with you and spend the whole afternoon there.

GERALD: We spent the whole afternoon on the river yesterday, and you kindly gave us our tea to take with us.

LADY SELLENGER: It reminds me of the happy days when I was engaged to your poor father, Nellie. We were just like you and Gerald. We couldn't bear to be out of one another's sight. Now, run and get your hat, darling.

NELLIE: Oh, mamma, I've got the most dreadful headache that I've ever had in my life, and I must really go and lie down.

LADY SELLENGER: Nonsense. An afternoon in the fresh air with Gerald is just the thing to put you right.

GERALD: I'm so sorry, but I have some very important letters to write. I *must* catch the post.

MRS. DOT: [*Sweetly.*] You'll have lots of time when you come in. The post doesn't go till after dinner.

LADY SELLENGER: If you make excuses like that, poor Nellie will think she bores you already.

GERALD: In that case I shall be only too glad to go on the river.

MRS. DOT: Take my sunshade, darling. You won't want a hat.

NELLIE: [*Savagely.*] Thank you, dear.

[NELLIE and GERALD go out gloomily.]

LADY SELLENGER: Just like humming-birds, aren't they?

MRS. DOT: Do you mean turtle-doves by any chance?

LADY SELLENGER: I was never very good at natural history.
. . . Dear Mrs. Worthley, I must really thank you for the tact with which you've thrown Gerald and Nellie in one another's society every moment of the day.

MRS. DOT: I can flatter myself that *they've* thoroughly enjoyed their week here.

[AUNT ELIZA *comes in with* BLENKINSOP.]

LADY SELLENGER: [*With a look of intelligence.*] Dear Mr. Blenkinsop, you wicked, wicked cynic. [*Meaningly.*] I shall go and lie down. Are you coming upstairs, Miss MacGregor?

AUNT ELIZA: In one minute.

LADY SELLENGER: I want to have a little talk with you. [*As BLENKINSOP holds open the door for her, in a whisper.*] Aren't I tactful?

[LADY SELLENGER *goes out.*]

BLENKINSOP: What villainy is that old woman up to now?

MRS. DOT: You idiot! Don't you see that she's discovered the passion that devours our hearts—your manly bosom and my timid, fluttering heart—and she wants to leave us alone.

BLENKINSOP: I'm beginning to feel very unwell.

MRS. DOT: [*Archly.*] Wouldn't you be rather flattered if I really were in love with you?

BLENKINSOP: [*Alarmed.*] Dot, don't make these horrible suggestions. You make my flesh creep.

MRS. DOT: But you've been so cold, you haven't given me a chance.

BLENKINSOP: Cold! Heaven knows what would have happened if I'd given you any encouragement. I've never been able to take my eyes off the ground without finding yours fixed on me with the languishing expression of a dying duck in a thunderstorm. I've never been able to

go near you without your stroking me as if I were a velvet cushion or a Persian cat. I've not eaten a single meal in peace in case you suddenly took it into your head to press my foot under the table.

MRS. DOT: What would you have done if I had?

BLINKINSOP: [*With outraged dignity.*] I should have screamed! And the thought of that special licence has cast a chill in my heart. I don't know what it's all coming to. You are my witness, Miss MacGregor, that I won't marry her, however deeply she compromises me.

AUNT ELIZA: [*Smiling.*] I am your witness.

BLINKINSOP: She shan't make an honest man of me.

[*Mrs. Dot takes from a drawer of the escritoire one of the licences.*]

MRS. DOT: [*Smiling.*] Frances Annandale Worthley—James Blinkinsop.

BLINKINSOP: I feel as though some one were walking over my grave.

AUNT ELIZA: But how on earth are you going to get Nellie Sellenger and Freddie to use the other licence?

MRS. DOT: When the right moment comes I shall leave it under their noses, and allow them to draw what consequences they choose. . . . If any woman ever earned a husband, I have. I've taken every opportunity to snub Gerald till he can hardly contain himself with rage. I've thrown him in Nellie's company till they're both so bored they could almost cry. I've been constantly on the watch to prevent Nellie and Freddie from having two minutes by themselves till they can hardly bear the sight of me. And I've made love to you with a persistence that would have melted the heart of a fish. If I fail, it will be your fault.

BLINKINSOP: But what on earth do you want me to do?

MRS. DOT: Good heavens, throw a little passion into your

behaviour. Look at me as though you'd never seen any-one so ravishing in your life. When you take my hand, hold it as if you would never let it go.

[She takes his hand.]

BLENKINSOP: Remember, there's no one but Miss MacGregor present.

MRS. DOT: *[With a yearning glance.]* Look into my eyes like this.

BLENKINSOP: Don't. You make me feel very uncomfortable.

MRS. DOT: *[Impatiently.]* Oh, you're too stupid. You're a stock and a stone. You're an owl. You're a ridiculous idiot.

BLENKINSOP: Temper, temper.

MRS. DOT: You'll ruin my whole life, because you're such a perfect fool that you can't make love to a woman.

[She breaks away from him and begins to cry. He walks up and down, then looks at her with a smile. He makes a sign to MISS MACGREGOR that MRS. DOT cannot see.]

BLENKINSOP: *[In a different voice.]* Dot, this little game of ours has lasted long enough.

MRS. DOT: *[Sobbing in her handkerchief.]* Yes, it has. I'm sick to death of the whole thing.

BLENKINSOP: You asked me to play a part, and you didn't know that it might be deadly earnest.

MRS. DOT: Fiddlesticks!

BLENKINSOP: I have a secret that I can no longer keep from you.

MRS. DOT: Well, tell it to the horse-marines.

BLENKINSOP: Dot, I love you!

MRS. DOT: Oh, don't be so silly.

BLENKINSOP: But I tell you I'm not joking.

MRS. DOT: Thank heaven for that. I'm weary of your bad jokes.

BLINKINSOP: The thing started as a bad joke, but it has ended in something very different. A change has come over me, and I'm ashamed.

MRS. DOT: [*Looking up.*] Eh?

BLINKINSOP: Don't you see that I'm a different man? Dot, it's you who've changed me.

MRS. DOT: I really believe he's waking up.

BLINKINSOP: If I was shy and awkward, it's because I wouldn't give in to myself. I was overwhelmed. I couldn't understand.

MRS. DOT: That's much better. There really is a ring of emotion in your voice.

BLINKINSOP: How shouldn't there be, when I'm saying at last what has trembled on the tip of my tongue for ten days?

MRS. DOT: [*Delighted.*] There! That's just the tone I want. Talk with that quiver in your voice when you ask me to pass you the mustard at dinner.

BLINKINSOP: I lie awake at night thinking of you, and when I fall asleep I seem to hold you in my arms.

MRS. DOT: That's splendid. Why couldn't you say all this before?

BLINKINSOP: Dot, Dot, don't torture me. Don't you see I mean it.

MRS. DOT: What!

BLINKINSOP: I'm not jesting now. I wish to heaven I were.

MRS. DOT: [*Forcing a laugh.*] My dear James, you're really piling it on too much.

BLINKINSOP: You must be mad or blind. Can't you feel that I love you?

MRS. DOT: Don't be so absurd. You know you're only—you're only pulling my leg.

BLENKINSOP: Oh, I've been a perfect ass. I should never have consented to play this ghastly trick. If you only knew what tortures I've suffered!

MRS. DOT: He isn't really serious, Aunt Eliza?

AUNT ELIZA: [*Smiling.*] Upon my soul, it looks very much like it.

BLENKINSOP: What did you expect? You've played on my heartstrings as though they were an instrument that had no feeling. You've put a caress into every tone of your voice.

MRS. DOT: [*Ruefully.*] Of course, I am fascinating. I can't deny that.

BLENKINSOP: When you touched my hand, every nerve of my body thrilled.

MRS. DOT: You're not really in love with me?

BLENKINSOP: Passionately.

MRS. DOT: You're ridiculous, James Blenkinsop.

BLENKINSOP: I was a fool. I played with fire, and I never dreamed I'd burn myself.

MRS. DOT: But you mustn't be in love with me. I won't hear of it.

BLENKINSOP: It's too late to say that now. I adore you.

MRS. DOT: But what on earth's to be done?

BLENKINSOP: You must marry me.

MRS. DOT: Nothing will induce me to do anything of the sort.

BLENKINSOP: [*Going up to her with outstretched arms.*] You can't realise the wealth of tenderness and affection which I'll lavish upon you.

MRS. DOT: Go away! Don't come near me.

BLENKINSOP: Why should you care for Gerald? Do you think if he loved you, he would let a trifling engagement with somebody else stand in the way?

MRS. DOT: The fact is that men are never to be trusted.

BLINKINSOP: I can't live without you now. I'll give up my whole life to make you happy.

MRS. DOT: But I'm in love with Gerald. I'm not in love with you. I shall never be in love with you.

BLINKINSOP: You owe me something for all the agony you've made me endure. Dot, remember that licence. It was bought in jest, but the Archbishop of Canterbury was in earnest.

MRS. DOT: But my dear James, for heaven's sake be reasonable. You know just as well as I do that you're not a marrying man.

BLINKINSOP: Give me the chance, and you'll see.

MRS. DOT: I'm sure you wouldn't like me. I'm horrid really.

BLINKINSOP: I know that you're full of faults, but, bless you, I love them all.

MRS. DOT: I've got a beastly temper.

BLINKINSOP: I dote upon you when I see your eyes flash with anger.

MRS. DOT: I'm awfully extravagant, and if the Government brings in temperance legislation I shall be ruined.

BLINKINSOP: I'm rich. I should look upon it as the greatest happiness to spend my last penny to gratify your smallest wish.

MRS. DOT: I won't marry you. I won't marry you. I won't!

BLINKINSOP: Dot, Dot!

[He catches her in his arms and kisses her. At this moment GERALD comes in. MRS. DOT breaks away from BLINKINSOP. There is an awkward pause.]

MRS. DOT: *[To GERALD.]* I thought you were on the river.

GERALD: Hang the river!

[She goes to the door, which BLINKINSOP opens for her. She goes out. As AUNT ELIZA follows, he speaks to her in a low tone.]

BLENKINSOP: There's passion for you.

AUNT ELIZA: You brutes, you can all do it. You positively made my heart beat. *[She goes out.]*

GERALD: What did Miss MacGregor say?

BLENKINSOP: A vague suggestion of bigamy if I understood correctly.

GERALD: *[Frigidly.]* I'm afraid I came at an inopportune moment.

BLENKINSOP: It appears to be one of your happy little ways.

GERALD: Everyone seems to kiss everyone else in this house.

BLENKINSOP: *[With effrontery.]* You have only to envelop Lady Sellenger in your arms, and the picture will be complete.

GERALD: Would you kindly explain this incident?

BLENKINSOP: If you'll allow me to say so, I really can't see that it's any business of yours.

GERALD: *[Hotly.]* Look here, Blenkinsop, you've got no right to play your fool-tricks with Mrs. Dot. She's a very excitable and thoughtless woman. She's . . .

BLENKINSOP: Well?

GERALD: Oh, damn you!

BLENKINSOP: Not at all, not at all.

GERALD: *[Angrily.]* What the deuce is the meaning of all this tomfoolery?

BLENKINSOP: *[Blandly.]* I suppose you couldn't be a little more civil, could you?

GERALD: Look here, Blenkinsop, the best thing you can do is to receive a telegram that requires your immediate presence in town.

BLENKINSOP: Thanks very much, but I'm extremely comfortable down here.

GERALD: You'd be rather surprised if I threw you out of the window, wouldn't you?

BLINKINSOP: I should not only be surprised, but I should look upon it as an odious familiarity.

GERALD: Would you like to know my private opinion of you?

BLINKINSOP: Spare me my blushes, dear boy. It always embarrasses me to be flattered to my face.

GERALD: You silly old fool.

BLINKINSOP: I believe you're considerably annoyed.

GERALD: Not in the least. What the dickens is there about you that should annoy me?

BLINKINSOP: Now that I come to think of it, you are certainly in a passion. Your face is red, your attire is disordered, and you have a slight squint in your eye.

GERALD: My dear fellow, if I hadn't the best temper in the world, I should kick you.

BLINKINSOP: You'd far better go and lie down. You'll only say something which you'll regret.

GERALD: I suppose you're not for a moment under the impression that Mrs. Dot cares twopence about you.

BLINKINSOP: May I ask how that can in the least concern you?

GERALD: Mrs. Dot is an old friend of mine. I'm not going to see her made ridiculous by a conceited nincompoop.

BLINKINSOP: By the way, has it slipped your memory that you're engaged to Miss Sellenger?

GERALD: Good Lord, no!

BLINKINSOP: I daresay you wish it had.

GERALD: That's a confounded impertinent thing to say.

BLINKINSOP: My dear fellow, I never saw anyone with less common sense in my life. Surely it's not very extraordinary that the same tender passion which inflames the chaste breasts of yourself and Miss Sellenger, should

attack the equally chaste breasts of myself and Mrs Worthley.

GERALD: Don't talk such twaddle.

BLINKINSOP: I suppose you'd be considerably astonished if I told you that I'd just asked Mrs. Dot to be my wife.

GERALD: She must have screamed with laughter.

BLINKINSOP: You noticed her unconcealed hilarity when you came in.

GERALD: [*Going up to him quickly.*] You don't mean it!

BLINKINSOP: No man is quite safe from the toils of women till he's safely in his grave. And even then a feminine worm probably makes a dead set at him.

GERALD: And does Mrs. Dot—reciprocate your affection?

BLINKINSOP: Really you ask me a very delicate question.

GERALD: By the great Harry, the man thinks she's in love with him.

BLINKINSOP: [*Rather indignant.*] And pray, why shouldn't she be just as much in love with me as with you?

GERALD: [*With a burst of laughter.*] Ha, ha, ha.

BLINKINSOP: What the blazes are you laughing at?

GERALD: Hal hal hal

BLINKINSOP: Shut up, you blithering idiot!

GERALD: [*Still laughing.*] She *has* made a fool of you. Hal hal hal [*Seriously.*] And did you really think any woman would care for you? My poor Blinkinsop! My poor, poor Blinkinsop!

BLINKINSOP: You're a jackanapes, sir, you're an impudent jackanapes. And why not, pray?

GERALD: [*Furiously.*] Because you're revolting to look upon, and your conversation is inexpressibly tedious.

BLINKINSOP: It's charming of you to say so.

GERALD: If you want to marry anyone, marry Lady Sellenger.

BLENKINSOP: You are evidently under the impression that if a woman can't be so fortunate as to marry you, she had far better retire into a nunnery.

GERALD: You're a cantankerous cynic and a fatuous donkey.

BLENKINSOP: I like the delicacy with which you express your appreciation of my merits.

GERALD: Listen to me, Blenkinsop! Clear out of the house before you make a greater mess of things than you have already. Mrs. Dot would as soon marry her groom as marry you.

BLENKINSOP: You think it's quite impossible that she should ever have dreamt of such a thing?

GERALD: Not only impossible, but grotesque.

[BLENKINSOP goes to the drawer in which is the licence and takes it out.]

BLENKINSOP: Perhaps, then, it would interest you to inspect this document.

[GERALD takes it and looks at it, dumbfounded.]

GERALD: It's a special licence.

BLENKINSOP: So much less bother than banns you know.

GERALD: James Blenkinsop.

BLENKINSOP: And Frances Annandale Worthley.

GERALD: It's a mistake! It's all a preposterous mistake.

BLENKINSOP: You see, the Archbishop of Canterbury calls me his right well-beloved brother. Friendly, isn't it?

[GERALD violently tears it in pieces and flings them on the ground. BLENKINSOP gives a sigh of relief. GERALD stalks out of the room into the garden. BLENKINSOP goes to the door and waves his hand at him. MRS. DOT comes in. She has discovered that BLENKINSOP has been making a fool of her.]

BLENKINSOP: He's torn up your precious licence.

MRS. DOT: [*Quickly.*] Which one?

BLENKINSOP: Ours, of course. Three guineas gone bang, my dear.

MRS. DOT: [*Counting on her fingers.*] I'm reckoning how many bottles of beer the British public will have to drink for us to buy another.

BLENKINSOP: But your refusal of my hand will happily prevent you from going to that expense. Thereby considerably forwarding the cause of temperance.

MRS. DOT: [*With an assumption of overwhelming gravity.*] James, I have been thinking over all you said, and I am willing to marry you.

BLENKINSOP: [*A chill going down his spine.*] I thank you from the bottom of my heart, but I cannot accept this sacrifice.

MRS. DOT: It is no sacrifice when I think that I can make you happy.

BLENKINSOP: But you mustn't think of me. It's your happiness that we have to consider. Don't let a momentary impulse ruin your whole life.

MRS. DOT: I've thought it over very carefully. I cannot resist your passionate pleading.

BLENKINSOP: I will not be outdone in generosity. You have refused me. I accept your refusal as final.

MRS. DOT: I never realised that your nature was so great and tender. Every word you say makes me more determined to devote my life to your happiness.

BLENKINSOP: My dear Dot, much as I appreciate the beauty of your sentiments, I must confess that I could never marry a woman who did not love me.

MRS. DOT: [*As though she were struggling with her modesty.*] I see that you want to force from me the avowal that is so hard to make. Oh, you men!

BLENKINSOP: Good God, you don't mean to say you're in love with me?

MRS. DOT: [*Languishng.*] James. Is it so very wonderful?

BLENKINSOP: Half an hour ago you said you couldn't stand me at any price.

MRS. DOT: It's a woman's privilege to change her mind. The passion which you threw into your proposal has completely changed me. I am touched by the vehemence with which you flung your heart at my feet. I have struggled, but I cannot resist. Take me in your arms, James, and never let me go.

BLENKINSOP: Dot, I have a confession to make to you. I didn't mean a word I said.

MRS. DOT: Ah, James, do not jest.

BLENKINSOP: I assure you I'm perfectly serious. You taunted me that I couldn't make love, so I just let myself go to show you I could. I daresay it was a silly joke, but it certainly was a joke.

MRS. DOT: [*Unmoved.*] James, every word you say increases my admiration for you. I can't think now how I was ever blind to your great affection.

BLENKINSOP: But don't you hear what I say?

MRS. DOT: Do you think you can take me in so easily?

BLENKINSOP: You don't believe me?

MRS. DOT: Not a word.

BLENKINSOP: [*Thoroughly alarmed.*] Now, look here. I don't love you, I've never loved you, and I never shall love you. I can't put it any clearer than that.

MRS. DOT: [*With rapture.*] God, how he adores me!

BLENKINSOP: I say, look here, this is a bit too thick.

MRS. DOT: I know you only say these cruel things because you think I should be throwing myself away on you.

BLENKINSOP: [*Huffily.*] I don't know about that.

MRS. DOT: You cannot bear to think that I should accept you from pity. But it isn't that, James. You are handsome and noble and chivalrous. How shouldn't a woman love you?

BLINKINSOP: I repeat that I do not reciprocate your passion.

MRS. DOT: You can't deceive me so easily as that, James. I *know* you love me. We women have such quick intuitions.

BLINKINSOP: So you always say.

MRS. DOT: I see you simply quivering with restrained emotion. Oh, James, James, you've made me so happy.

[She flings herself on his bosom and pretends to burst into tears.]

BLINKINSOP: I say, take care. Supposing somebody saw us.

MRS. DOT: I should like all the world to see us.

BLINKINSOP: But it's devilish compromising.

MRS. DOT: I want to compromise myself. Only thus can I make you certain of my love. Oh, think of the many happy years we shall spend in one another's arms, James.

BLINKINSOP: *[Extricating himself from her embrace.]* Is there nothing I can say to undeceive you?

MRS. DOT: Nothing! I am yours till death.

BLINKINSOP: I will never give way to my sense of humour again.

MRS. DOT: *[Archly.]* Do you mind if I leave you just for one minute? After so much agitation I must really go and powder my nose.

BLINKINSOP: *[Ironically.]* Pray don't let me detain you.

MRS. DOT: Remember I am yours till death.

BLINKINSOP: It is very good of you to say so.

[She goes out. He rings the bell impatiently. THE BUTLER comes in.]

BLENKINSOP: Tell my servant I want him.

[THE BUTLER goes out. BLENKINSOP walks up and down, wringing his hands. THE SERVANT enters.

George, pack up my things at once and get the motor. There's not a moment to lose.

GEORGE: Are you going away, sir?

BLENKINSOP: [*Flying into a passion.*] You blithering fool, do you suppose I should want my things packed if I were staying? I'm going abroad to-night.

GEORGE: Very well, sir.

BLENKINSOP: You must take the train and go to Cook's at once and get some tickets.

GEORGE: Very well, sir. Where to, sir?

BLENKINSOP: Don't argue, sir, but do as I tell you.

GEORGE: I must know where to get the tickets for, sir.

BLENKINSOP: Oh, what it is to have a fool for a servant! Take a month's notice. I dismiss you. Where to, sir? Anywhere, sir? Somewhere that's a damned long way off. South Africa! I'll go and shoot lions in Uganda. And if there isn't a boat sailing at once, I'll go to America and shoot grizzlies in the Rocky Mountains.

GEORGE: Very dangerous climate, sir.

BLENKINSOP: Dangerous climate, sir? I would have you know it's not half such a dangerous climate as the valley of the Thames.

GEORGE: Very good, sir.

[*He goes out. MRS. DOT comes in. At the sight of her BLENKINSOP at once cools down.*

MRS. DOT: James, dear, did I hear you give orders for your things to be packed up?

BLENKINSOP: [*Calmly.*] No, my love. What could have put such an idea in your head?

MRS. DOT: You wouldn't leave me—darling?

BLENKINSOP: My angel, nothing now shall tear me from your side.

MRS. DOT: Dearest!

BLENKINSOP: [*Trying to restrain himself.*] Pet!

[*He goes into the garden. Mrs. Dot begins to laugh*
FREDDIE comes in, with letters in his hand.

FREDDIE: I say, I wish you'd just have a look at these letters.

MRS. DOT: Oh, yes. I want to have a little talk with you, Freddie. [*She takes one of the letters and reads.*] "I am directed by Mrs. Worthley to congratulate you on the recent addition to your family, but to express her regret that she cannot accede to your request." How brutal you are, Freddie! Surely Mrs. Murphy is an old friend.

FREDDIE: I looked her out in my note-book. Six months ago we sent her fifteen pounds because she had nine children. Now she has eleven.

MRS. DOT: And yet they complain that the birth-rate is falling. I think we'd better send her five pounds.

FREDDIE: You really can't encourage a woman who has twins twice a year, when her husband is not only bed-ridden but a hopeless lunatic.

MRS. DOT: Perhaps she *is* a little prolific.

FREDDIE: Here is my answer to Mrs. MacTavish, who wants help to bury a husband.

MRS. DOT: Poor thing! You'd better send her ten pounds.

FREDDIE: I've answered: "Madam, I regret to see that this is the third time you have lost your husband within two years. The mortality among the unhappy gentlemen on whom you bestow your hand is so great that I can only recommend you in future to remain a widow. Yours faithfully, Frederick Perkins."

MRS. DOT: [*Reading a letter which he hands to her.*] "I am pleased to hear that the wooden leg for which Mrs. Worthley paid for last year has proved satisfactory, but I

cannot recommend her to provide you with another. To lose one leg in a railway accident is a misfortune, but to lose a second in a colliery explosion points to carelessness." That's not original, Freddie.

FREDDIE: I'm so hard up, I can only afford to make other people's jokes.

MRS. DOT: [*With a shrewd look at him.*] Freddie, I've been exceedingly pleased with your behaviour during the last week. I've watched you carefully, and I'm glad to see that you've done all that was possible to destroy poor Nellie's affection for you.

FREDDIE: [*Gravely.*] I've tried to do my duty.

MRS. DOT: I know. And in recognition of this I want you to accept a little present. Where is my cheque-book?

FREDDIE: [*Producing it promptly.*] Oh, no, really, I shouldn't like you to do anything of the sort. [*Putting it in front of her, and giving her a pen.*] I feel that I'm amply paid for all that I do for you. I simply can't accept anything more.

MRS. DOT: I was afraid you would object.

[*She writes, and he watches her carefully.*]

FREDDIE: Five hundred pounds. Oh, you are a ripper! But why on earth do you give me that?

MRS. DOT: It may be useful to you. Suppose you had an idea of getting married, for instance, it would be very convenient to have a sum like that in your pocket.

FREDDIE: But I'm not thinking of getting married.

MRS. DOT: Aren't you? I suppose you know that when you do, I'm proposing to give you two thousand a year.

FREDDIE: I say, that's awfully good of you.

[*He takes the cheque and gloats over it. Mrs. Dot quickly takes a special licence out of the drawer and puts it on the table.*]

MRS. DOT: Now I'm going for a turn in the garden.

FREDDIE: You are a brick.

[*She goes out. As soon as he sees the coast is clear, he gives a peculiar whistle. NELLIE comes in.*]

NELLIE: I thought your whistle was never coming. They wanted me to go on the river. I had to invent all sorts of excuses.

FREDDIE: I don't know how it is, but somehow we never manage to get a minute by ourselves.

NELLIE: It's perfectly maddening. What a good idea it was of yours to meet in the garden after they'd all gone to bed.

FREDDIE: Was it my idea? I always thought it was yours!

NELLIE: [*With wounded dignity.*] It's not likely I should have proposed a thing like that.

FREDDIE: No, it isn't likely.

NELLIE: I'm perfectly distracted. If you only knew how that man bores me!

FREDDIE: I can't think what you ever saw in him.

NELLIE: I was never really fond of him, you know. I only accepted him because he was so desperately in love with me, and mamma wouldn't hear of it.

FREDDIE: When did you first know that you cared for me?

NELLIE: Oh, I don't know. I think as soon as ever I found out you were in love with me.

FREDDIE: [*Rather taken aback.*] Oh!

NELLIE: When did you begin to love me?

FREDDIE: Well, you know, I was awfully flattered by your caring for me.

NELLIE: Oh! . . . [*There is a pause.*] I don't think I quite understand.

FREDDIE: [*Opening his arms.*] Darling!

NELLIE: [*Cuddling in them.*] Oh, it makes me feel so delight-

fully wicked. I know I oughtn't to let you kiss me. I know it's treachery to poor Gerald.

FREDDIE: He isn't worthy of you.

NELLIE: He simply worships the ground I tread on. I am a perfect beast.

FREDDIE: We're treating him shamefully.

NELLIE: I shall never forgive myself.

FREDDIE: Poor Gerald. . . . He is an ass, isn't he?

NELLIE: Oh, awful. *[They both go into shrieks of laughter.]*

NELLIE: Take care!

[Mrs. Dot comes in with flowers in her hands.]

MRS. DOT: Did I leave my scissors here? Just see if you can find them, Freddie. Perhaps they're in the next room.

[He goes out.] I wonder if I left them on the writing-table.

[Nellie looks, sees the licence, starts and turns round to hide it.]

NELLIE: *[Agitated.]* No, there's nothing here at all.

[Freddie comes in with the scissors.]

FREDDIE: Here they are!

MRS. DOT: Thanks so much. *[She goes out.]*

NELLIE: Freddie, how could you be so incautious? It was only by the greatest presence of mind that I was able to hide it.

FREDDIE: What *do* you mean?

NELLIE: You ought to have told me. I don't think it was nice of you to get a licence without saying a word to me about it. I think it was a great liberty.

FREDDIE: A licence?

NELLIE: You must know that I can't marry you. Nothing will induce me to break my promise to Gerald. I'm very angry with you.

FREDDIE: I haven't the least idea what you're talking about.

NELLIE: How can you tell such stories?

[*She hands him the licence. He stares at it, utterly astonished.*]

FREDDIE: Where did you find this?

NELLIE: It was lying on the writing-table. I suppose you're not going to deny all knowledge of it. [*He stares at it still.*] Freddie, how bold of you! But you really couldn't imagine for a moment that I'd consent to run away with you. Oh, Freddie, I'm so flattered. How you must love me!

FREDDIE: [*To himself.*] Two thousand a year! [*He takes the cheque from his pocket and looks at it. Suddenly light dawns on him. He puts cheque and licence back into his pocket.*] It's fairly clear that a licence couldn't have got there by itself.

NELLIE: What on earth made you think of sending for it?

FREDDIE: [*Bravely.*] I thought it was the only way to win you.

NELLIE: Have you had it long?

FREDDIE: It only arrived this morning. Look here, why shouldn't we bolt? You don't care a straw for Gerald, and you do care for me.

NELLIE: It would break his heart. I couldn't, I couldn't! Besides, where are we to bolt to? I daren't. Mamma would never forgive me.

FREDDIE: You see, with this we can be married anywhere. Let's jump into the motor and go down to my father near Oxford. We shall arrive by dinner-time, and he'll marry us to-morrow morning.

NELLIE: You don't mean to say your father's in the Church?

FREDDIE: Of course he's in the Church. I was most careful in my choice of a parent.

NELLIE: Oh, how clever of you to have a father who's a clergyman! You think of everything, Freddie.

FREDDIE: Look here, there's not a minute to waste. Will you risk it?

NELLIE: No, no, no! Freddie, how can you ask me such a thing. . . . I'll just go and put on my hat.

FREDDIE: You brick.

[She runs out. He walks up and down excitedly. The servants bring in the tea. NELLIE comes back with her hat on.]

FREDDIE: Hurry up!

NELLIE: This *is* romance, isn't it?

[They go to the door that leads into the garden, hand in hand. They are confronted by LADY SELLENGER and GERALD, BLENKINSOP and MISS MACGREGOR.]

LADY SELLENGER: Where are you going in such a hurry?

NELLIE: *[Promptly.]* We were just going to call you all in to tea. *[Mrs. Dot comes in.]*

MRS. DOT: I've just had the motor brought round in case any one would like to go out.

[She goes to the writing-table to see if the licence has been removed. They all sit down and have tea.]

LADY SELLENGER: Nellie, my love, I've been discussing a very important matter with Gerald.

MRS. DOT: I know. You asked him to name the day.

LADY SELLENGER: I feel that I have no right to restrain any longer the very natural impatience of these young things.

NELLIE: *[Aghast.]* And what did Gerald say?

LADY SELLENGER: He wishes to leave it entirely to you.

NELLIE: I'm sure that's very obliging of him.

GERALD: Not at all.

MRS. DOT: Of course, he's all eagerness.

GERALD: *[Grimly.]* Yes.

NELLIE: I would much sooner—let Gerald fix it at his own convenience.

LADY SELLENGER: I think it's delightful, the way they give in to one another.

GERALD: We shall only bore Mrs. Dot if we discuss the matter now.

LADY SELLENGER: We're all old friends here. I'm sure Mrs. Dot will help us with her advice.

MRS. DOT: My own opinion is, that in these matters the sooner the better.

BLENKINSOP: When you have to take a pill the best thing is to swallow it down without thinking.

LADY SELLENGER: Cynic! What do you say to six weeks from to-day?

NELLIE: That would suit me beautifully.

GERALD: Then there's no more to be said.

LADY SELLENGER: What a beautiful thing love is!

[NELLIE gets up.]

NELLIE: [*To FREDDIE.*] Are you coming?

FREDDIE: Certainly.

LADY SELLENGER: [*Surprised.*] Where are you going, Nellie?

NELLIE: Mr. Perkins has promised to take me for a little drive in the motor. I feel it's the only thing to send away my headache.

LADY SELLENGER: [*In an undertone.*] My darling, is this wise? Remember the feelings of this poor young man.

NELLIE: [*Also in an undertone.*] I thought you'd like an opportunity of talking privately to Gerald.

LADY SELLENGER: Why, darling?

NELLIE: Dear mamma, the settlements.

LADY SELLENGER: [*Smiling affectionately.*] You sweet, practical child! You'll be your own mother again at my age.

NELLIE: May I go then?

LADY SELLENGER: Do. But don't be away very long.

NELLIE: [*Kissing her.*] Good-bye, mamma.

[She goes out with FREDDIE. Almost immediately the sound of a motor-horn is heard, as they drive away.]

LADY SELLENGER: The dear child, she has such a sweet, trusting nature. You must kiss me, too, Gerald!

GERALD: I shall be delighted, I'm sure.

[She puts up her cheek, which he kisses. A SERVANT comes in with a note.]

SERVANT: Miss Sellenger told me to give you this at once, Madam.

MRS. DOT: Oh. [*She opens it and gives a cry.*] Good heavens! Oh, the deceitful wretch! Lady Sellenger, how shall I tell you? It's from Nellie.

LADY SELLENGER: From Nellie!

MRS. DOT: [*Reading.*] "Dear Mrs. Dot, I'm just off to marry Freddie. Break it to Mamma gently."

LADY SELLENGER: [*Starting up.*] Impossible! Stop them! Stop them! Where are they?

MRS. DOT: [*Reading.*] "I couldn't marry Gerald. He's too great a"—there's a word in big letters. I never could read capitals. [*She hands the note to GERALD.*]

GERALD: The word is "B. O. R. E."

MRS. DOT: [*Pretending to be much surprised.*] Borel

BLENKINSOP: [*With immense satisfaction.*] Borel

AUNT ELIZA: [*Meditatively.*] Borel

LADY SELLENGER: Oh, how monstrous! My poor Gerald, what shall I do?

[GERALD goes into a roar of laughter. He laughs louder and louder.]

LADY SELLENGER: Gerald! Gerald! Don't! Pull yourself together. The poor boy, he's perfectly hysterical. Where are my salts? Mrs. Dot, for heaven's sake calm him down. Oh, my dear! You mustn't upset yourself yet.

BLENKINSOP: He looks cut up, doesn't he?

LADY SELLENGER: We'll pursue them. There's no harm done yet. We'll catch them. I promise you we'll catch them. You shall marry her, Gerald, if I have to drag her to church by the hair of her head.

[At this she stops suddenly and stares at her in dismay.]

GERALD: What are you going to do?

LADY SELLENGER: We must chase them. Where's your motor, Mr. Blenkinsop? Didn't you tell me it was the fastest machine in England?

BLENKINSOP: I did say something of the sort.

LADY SELLENGER: We shall catch them up. Gerald, you must drive me. I can't trust any one else to go fast enough.

MRS. DOT: But you don't know which way they're gone.

LADY SELLENGER: Don't be so silly. Of course they've gone to Brighton. When people elope they always go to Brighton.

[Mrs. Dot slips out of the room.]

GERALD: And what'll you do if we come up to them? You can't force them to come back.

LADY SELLENGER: If a woman can't force her daughter to marry any man she chooses, I don't know what the English nation is coming to.

GERALD: I won't marry the girl against her will.

LADY SELLENGER: Fiddlededee! Of course you'll marry her. Who is this creature she's run away with? Perkins! Perkins with a P. I never heard anything so ridiculous. Do you suppose my daughter is going to be Mrs. Perkins—Perkins with a P?

BLENKINSOP: You couldn't very well spell it with a W could you?

LADY SELLENGER: Hold your impudent tongue, sir!

GERALD: Now, let's have this out and be done with it. I'm no more in love with Nellie than she is with me, I was going to marry her because I'd promised to, and it seemed a low down trick to draw back . . .

LADY SELLENGER: The man's mad. The shock has turned his brain.

GERALD: When I heard she'd bolted, I could have jumped for joy. I seem to have awaked out of a ghastly nightmare. Nothing will induce me to try and catch her up.

LADY SELLENGER: You monster! How dare you trifle with the affections of my daughter! You don't mean to stand by and see her marry a man called Perkins!

GERALD: I wouldn't even mind if she married a man called Vere de Vere.

LADY SELLENGER: Very well, then, the chauffeur shall drive me. You're a heartless brute. Perkins with a P. And penniless to boot.

[She flounces out of the room and bangs the door.]

GERALD: Where's Mrs. Dot?

[He goes into the garden.]

BLENKINSOP: What a charming mother-in-law that woman will makel

[Mrs. Dot comes in with a large kitchen knife in one hand and a poker in the other.]

MRS. DOT: I've done it!

BLENKINSOP: Done what?

MRS. DOT: Lady Sellenger thinks she's going in your motor, but she isn't.

BLENKINSOP: *[Starting up.]* What have you done to my motor?

MRS. DOT: As soon as she talked of it, I ran to the kitchen and seized this knife and I seized this poker.

BLINKINSOP: Woman!

MRS. DOT: I've ripped up all the tyres, they're simply in ribands, James.

BLINKINSOP: Good Lord!

MRS. DOT: I don't know what I've done to the steering gear, but I know it'll never work again. Oh, it's in an awful state.

BLINKINSOP: But that's a bran-new motor. I've just paid eighteen hundred pounds for it.

MRS. DOT: And so that there shouldn't be any risk I opened the place where the works are, and I rummaged around with the poker. I *think* I've smashed everything.

BLINKINSOP: Oh! Oh! [He buries his head in his hands.]

MRS. DOT: The thing's a wreck and a ruin. You should have seen the tyres go flop, flop, flop.

BLINKINSOP: But I'm going to race next week.

MRS. DOT: It'll be impossible to move it for a month. It is in a state.

BLINKINSOP: Eighteen hundred pounds!

MRS. DOT: I don't know how much it'll cost to put right. You don't mind, James, do you?

BLINKINSOP: Mind!

MRS. DOT: I shouldn't like you to be cross with me.

BLINKINSOP: [*Furiously.*] Oh!

MRS. DOT: You won't let this disturb your affection for me? Remember that you're going to marry me.

BLINKINSOP: ~~Marry~~ you. I'd rather marry my cook.

[He flings out of the room.]

MRS. DOT: [*Looking after him, innocently.*] He is in a temper, isn't he? It's very hard to please everybody in this life.

AUNT ELIZA: You're quite incorrigible.

MRS. DOT: Would you mind taking these implements away? I'm really very tired.

AUNT ELIZA: I suppose breaking motors is rather hard work.

MRS. DOT: And you get very little thanks for it.

[AUNT ELIZA goes out. MRS. DOT sinks into a chair, with a sigh of relief. GERALD comes in. She realises that he is behind her, but pretends not to notice him. He comes up softly.]

GERALD: Dot!

MRS. DOT: [*Pretending to start.*] Oh, how you frightened me! You might remember that my nerves are in a very agitated state.

GERALD: You asked me a question a little while ago. I can answer it now.

MRS. DOT: I'm so sorry, I've quite forgotten what it was. It can't have been of the smallest importance.

GERALD: You asked me if I loved you.

MRS. DOT: How absurd! And do you?

GERALD: With all my heart, and I've loved you passionately from the first moment I saw you.

MRS. DOT: With never a day off?

GERALD: With never a day off. I wanted to tell you every minute, and yet I couldn't be such a cad.

MRS. DOT: [*Sarcastically.*] It's awfully nice of you to say all this, and I can't tell you how flattered I am.

GERALD: Dot!

MRS. DOT: Only it's rather late in the day. I've promised my hand and heart to James Blenkinsop.

GERALD: Fiddle!

MRS. DOT: [*Raising her eyebrows.*] I beg your pardon?

GERALD: [*Firmly.*] Fiddle!

MRS. DOT: Are you under the delusion that because a happy chance has freed you from a previous engagement, I'm going to seize the opportunity and leap into your arms?

GERALD: You know, women are brutes. One tries to do the straight thing and behave more or less like a white man and they make you feel as if you'd been an utter beast.

MRS. DOT: Do you know why Nellie jilted you? Because you're a bore.

GERALD: [*Smiling.*] I daresay I'm very stupid. I suppose that's why I love you so much.

MRS. DOT: My dear Gerald, you were cured of your passion for Nellie in a month. I have no doubt that a week in Paris will make your heart whole once more.

GERALD: [*Calmly.*] Are you packing me off by any chance?

MRS. DOT: Marked—damaged.

GERALD: [*With his tongue in his cheek.*] Then Good-bye!

MRS. DOT: *Bon voyage.*

[He turns to go and walks slowly to the door. She seizes a cushion and throws it at him, then turns her back on him. He stops, picks up the cushion and gravely brings it to her.]

GERALD: I think you dropped something.

MRS. DOT: [*Gravely.*] Thank you.

[He looks at her, with a smile. She begins to laugh. Suddenly he takes her in his arms.]

GERALD: You silly little fool.

THE END

JACK STRAW

A FARCE
in Three Acts

CHARACTERS

JACK STRAW
MR. PARKER-JENNINGS
MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS
VINCENT
ETHEL
AMBROSE HOLLAND
LADY WANLEY
LORD SERLO
COUNT ADRIAN VON BREMER
HORTON WITHERS
MRS. WITHERS
THE REV. LEWIS ABBOTT
ROSIE ABBOTT

Waiters at the Grand Babylon Hotel and Footmen at
Taverner, the Parker-Jennings' place in Cheshire.

TIME: 1905.

JACK STRAW

THE FIRST ACT

SCENE: *The lounge and winter garden of the Grand Babylon Hotel. There are palms and flowers in profusion, and numbers of little tables surrounded each by two or three chairs. Several people are seated, drinking coffee and liquors. At the back a flight of steps leads to the restaurant, separated from the winter garden by a leaded glass partition and swinging doors. In the restaurant a band is playing.*

Two or three waiters are standing about or serving customers.

AMBROSE HOLLAND and LADY WANLEY come out from the restaurant. He is a well-dressed, elegant man of five-and-thirty. She is a handsome widow of uncertain age.

LADY WANLEY: [*Pausing at the foot of the steps.*] Where shall we sit?

HOLLAND: Let us choose a retired corner where we can gossip in peace.

LADY WANLEY: Nonsense! I didn't come to the Grand Babylon in order to blush unseen. I caught sight of a number of people during luncheon, who I'm quite determined shall catch sight of me now.

HOLLAND: I was sufficiently gallant to have eyes for you only.

LADY WANLEY: [*Pointing to a table.*] Shall we sit there?

HOLLAND: D'you mind sitting on the other side? The waiter's rather a pal of mine.

LADY WANLEY: [*Sitting down.*] What queer friends you have.

HOLLAND: Waiter.

A WAITER: [*Coming forward.*] Your waiter will be here in one minute, sir.

HOLLAND: [*To LADY WANLEY.*] You see, I've knocked about in so many places that I have friends in every city in the world and every rank in life.

LADY WANLEY: I suppose you saw the Parker-Jennings? They were sitting three tables from us.

HOLLAND: I did.

LADY WANLEY: Do you know that she cut me dead when I came in?

HOLLAND: I've long told you that Mrs. Parker-Jennings is growing exclusive.

LADY WANLEY: But, my dear Ambrose, that she should have the impudence to cut me. . . .

HOLLAND: [*Smiling.*] I respect her for it.

LADY WANLEY: I'm much obliged to you.

HOLLAND: I don't think it does much credit to her heart, but it certainly does to her understanding. She has discovered that a title nowadays is not nearly such a good passport to the world of fashion as she thought it was. She knows you're as poor as a church mouse, and she's realised that in Society the poor are quite rightly hated and despised by all who know them.

LADY WANLEY: Yes, but remember the circumstances. Five years ago the Parker-Jennings didn't know a soul in the world. They'd lived in Brixton all their lives.

HOLLAND: It has been whispered to me that in those days they were known as Mr. and Mrs. Bob Jennings—not nearly so smart, is it?

LADY WANLEY: He used to go to the City every morning with a black bag in one hand and an umbrella in the other.

HOLLAND: I wish that confounded waiter would come.

LADY WANLEY: One day an uncle in the North, from whom

they vaguely had expectations, died suddenly and left them nearly two millions.

HOLLAND: Some people are so lucky in the way they choose their uncles.

LADY WANLEY: He was a hardware manufacturer, and no one dreamt that he had a tenth part of that fortune. I came across them in Switzerland and found they were looking for a house.

HOLLAND: So, with a burst of hospitality, you asked them down to Taverner, and they took it for twenty-one years.

LADY WANLEY: I introduced them to every one in the county. I gave little parties so that they might meet people. And now, if you please, the woman cuts me.

HOLLAND: [*Dryly.*] You have left out an essential detail in the account of your relations with these good folk.

LADY WANLEY: Have I?

HOLLAND: [*Smiling.*] You have omitted to mention that when they took Taverner they agreed to pay an exorbitant rent.

LADY WANLEY: They could well afford it. Besides, it was a historic place. It was worth whatever I could get for it.

HOLLAND: Parker-Jennings may be very vulgar, but he's as shrewd a man as you'd find anywhere between Park Lane and Jerusalem.

LADY WANLEY: I haven't the least idea what you're talking about.

HOLLAND: Haven't you? Well, then, I venture to suggest that if Mr. Parker-Jennings gave you such an enormous rent for Taverner, it was on a certain understanding. He was wise enough to find out that people can live in Cheshire all their lives and never know a soul. I don't suppose he put it in the agreement between you, but unless I am very much mistaken he took your place only on the condition that you should get every one to call.

LADY WANLEY: [*After a brief pause.*] I was crippled with mortgages, and I had to send my boys to Eton.

HOLLAND: Good heavens, I'm not blaming you. I only wish to point out that if you introduced Mrs. Jennings to your friends, it was a matter of business rather than of sentiment.

LADY WANLEY: [*With a little laugh.*] I suppose you think it's very natural that she should wish to kick away the ladder by which she climbed.

[*A WAITER comes up to HOLLAND.*]

WAITER (JACK STRAW): Yes, sir.

HOLLAND: Two coffees and two Benedictines. But you're not my usual waiter. Where's Pierre?

WAITER: [*Blandly.*] He's attending the funeral of an elderly female relative, sir.

[*HOLLAND looks up quickly, and then stares in a puzzled way.*]

HOLLAND: I seem to know your face. Have I seen you anywhere?

WAITER: [*With a smile.*] Mr. Ambrose Holland, I think.

HOLLAND: Jack Straw! What on earth are you doing here?

JACK STRAW: My dear fellow, it is possible to be no less of a philosopher in the uniform of a waiter at the Grand Babylon Hotel than in the gown of a professor at the University of Oxford. [*He goes out.*]

LADY WANLEY: [*Laughing.*] It's really very odd that waiters should address you as my dear fellow.

HOLLAND: What an extraordinary encounter!

LADY WANLEY: Please tell me who your friend is.

HOLLAND: I haven't the ghost of an idea.

LADY WANLEY: My dear Ambrose.

HOLLAND: I first met him in the States. I was in considerable financial difficulties in those days—it's three or four

years ago now—and I got a small part in a travelling company. Jack Straw was a member of it, and we became great friends.

LADY WANLEY: Is that his name?

HOLLAND: So he assures me.

LADY WANLEY: It's very improbable, isn't it?

HOLLAND: Very. I believe Jack Straw was a highwayman, or something like that, and he's given his name to a public-house in Hampstead.

LADY WANLEY: He must be an extraordinary man.

HOLLAND: He is. I don't know whether I admire most his self-assurance or his resourcefulness. I spent with him the last two years before my ship came home. We had some pretty rough times together, but he was a pillar of strength. Difficulties seemed to arise only that he might surmount them.

LADY WANLEY: He sounds quite splendid.

HOLLAND: The worst of living with him was that you had no breathing-time. He's a man with an uncontrollable love of adventure. Prosperity bores him to death, and time after time, when we'd managed to get out of rough water into smooth, he'd throw up everything for some wild goose chase.

LADY WANLEY: But who are his people?

HOLLAND: Heaven only knows. I know he isn't English, though he speaks it wonderfully.

LADY WANLEY: Is he by way of being a gentleman?

HOLLAND: I can only tell you that he's thoroughly at home in whatever society he finds himself.

LADY WANLEY: I daresay that's not a bad definition of a gentleman.

HOLLAND: He's sailed before the mast, been a bar-tender in New York, and an engine-driver on the Canadian Pacific. He's been a miner up in the Klondyke, and he's

worked on a ranch in Texas. And if he's a waiter now, I daresay he'll be an organ-grinder next week, and a company-promoter the week after. I've seen half a dozen fortunes within his grasp, and he's let them all slip through his fingers from sheer indifference to money.

LADY WANLEY: Here he is with the coffee.

[JACK STRAW *comes in with coffee and liqueurs.*

HOLLAND: I should be overwhelmed with confusion at allowing you to wait on me, if I did not feel certain that it appeals enormously to your sense of humour.

JACK STRAW: It has occurred to me that you will feel a natural hesitation about giving me a tip. I may as well tell you at once that I shall feel none about taking it.

HOLLAND: It's thoughtful of you to warn me. How much do I owe you?

JACK STRAW: Two shillings the coffee and three shillings the liqueur. The prices seem exorbitant to me, but I suppose people must expect to pay for the privilege of letting their friends see them at the best hotel in Europe.

HOLLAND: [*Putting down a coin.*] Don't bother about the change.

JACK STRAW: Half a sovereign. My dear fellow, when you offer me a tip of five shillings you are presuming unwarrantably on our former acquaintance.

HOLLAND: [*Helplessly.*] I'm sure I beg your pardon.

JACK STRAW: I will keep one shilling as an adequate remuneration for my services and return you four.

HOLLAND: I am overpowered by your condescension.

JACK STRAW: [*To LADY WANLEY, who has put a cigarette in her mouth.*] Light, madam?

HOLLAND: I should like to ask you to sit down.

JACK STRAW: It would be eminently improper. Besides, I have other tables to attend to. But I shall be delighted

to dine with you to-night if you have no other engagement.

HOLLAND: It's very kind of you. But will not your duties here detain you? . . . Mr. Straw—Lady Wanley.

JACK STRAW: [*Bowing.*] How do you do. I'm only engaged here for the afternoon. Your ladyship is aware that the lower orders make a speciality in the decease of elderly female relatives.

LADY WANLEY: I have often been impressed by the piety with which they bury their maternal grandmothers.

JACK STRAW: It appears that Pierre, an old acquaintance of mine, wished to attend the funeral of a widowed aunt, the relic of an egg importer in Soho, and a highly respectable person.

LADY WANLEY: I can well imagine that nothing could be more respectable than to import eggs to Soho.

JACK STRAW: The head-waiter, who is an excellent fellow, with female relatives of his own, promised to overlook his absence if he could find a substitute. Pierre, like myself, is a person of somewhat striking physique and could find no one able to wear his clothes. He confided his distress to me, and I, knowing that his uniform would fit me like a glove, offered at once to step into the—breach.

HOLLAND: I am relieved to hear that your appearance in this capacity is not due to embarrassed circumstances.

JACK STRAW: I deplore the hastiness of your reasoning. My circumstances are excessively embarrassed. Excuse me, I see some people who are proposing to sit at one of my tables.

[Meanwhile people have been coming down from the restaurant and sitting at the various tables. Waiters have been handing them coffee. HORTON WITHERS and MRS. WITHERS come down, accompanied by the REV.]

LEWIS ABBOTT and MRS. ABBOTT (ROSIE). JACK STRAW leaves HOLLAND and LADY WANLEY to attend to some people.

LADY WANLEY: There are the Withers. Why, they've got Rosie with them and her husband.

[She gets up and goes towards the WITHERS, who are honest, simple people, not distinguished, but good-natured and kindly. LEWIS ABBOTT is a nice-looking, frank young parson. ROSIE is very pretty and fragile. She is simply dressed.]

LADY WANLEY: *[Smiling to ROSIE.]* My dear, what are you doing in this sink of iniquity? I am surprised to see you. And Lewis!

[She shakes hands, evidently delighted to see them.]

WITHERS: We've brought them up to London for a little jaunt.

HOLLAND: Won't you all sit at our table? There's plenty of room.

WITHERS: That's very kind of you. *[To his wife.]* Fanny, you know Mr. Holland.

MRS. WITHERS: Yes, of course I do. How do you do, Lady Wanley.

LADY WANLEY: How do you do? Now you two young things must sit one on each side of me, and you must tell me all about Taverner.

ROSIE: Oh, we're so happy there, and everything's beautiful, and we just love the house.

LADY WANLEY: I don't believe you know Mr. Holland. Ambrose, this is Rosie, Jasper Neville's daughter. You knew him well, didn't you?

HOLLAND: Of course I did.

LADY WANLEY: And this is Rosie's husband and my new Vicar at Taverner.

ABBOTT: It makes me feel awfully grand.

LADY WANLEY: I adore them both, so you must like them. These dear things were waiting to be married. Lewis was a curate in some dreadfully shabby suburb, and he's a saint.

ABBOTT: I wish you wouldn't say such absurd things about me.

LADY WANLEY: Nonsense. He's a saint, but quite a modern nice sort of saint, who plays cricket and doesn't wear a hair shirt. And of course he couldn't marry Rosie, who hadn't a penny to bless herself with, but Providence came to the rescue and carried off our old Vicar with influenza.

ROSIE: What dreadful things you say, Lady Wanley.

LADY WANLEY: And the living's in my gift, so I gave it to them, and there they are.

ROSIE: You have been nice to us.

LADY WANLEY: My dears, you're the only really good people I've ever known in my life. I used to think my boys were till they went to Eton, and now I know they're devils.

WITHERS: We're all under a debt of gratitude to you, Lady Wanley. Every one worships them in the parish.

ABBOTT: Every one's been very jolly, and they all try to make things easy for us.

MRS. WITHERS: You know, they will work so hard, we could hardly persuade them to come up to London for two or three days.

WITHERS: I daresay you've heard that we've taken a little place near Taverner.

HOLLAND: Lady Wanley was telling me at luncheon.

LADY WANLEY: [*To ROSIE.*] And are you enjoying yourself in London, darling?

ROSIE: [*Enthusiastically.*] Oh, it's simply splendid. You don't know what a treat it is to us to come to the Grand

Babylon. It makes us feel so smart. And to-night we're going to the Gaiety.

LADY WANLEY: [*To WITHERS.*] It's very nice of you to be so good to these young people.

MRS. WITHERS: It's a pleasure to us to see how they enjoy everything.

ROSIE: D'you know the Parker-Jennings are here? Isn't it nice? They will be surprised when they see us, won't they, Lewis?

MRS. WITHERS: [*With a little sniff.*] I see Maria Jennings has got a lord with her.

HOLLAND: Serlo, isn't it? I thought I saw him.

WITHERS: I suppose you know they're trying to hook him for Ethel?

LADY WANLEY: Good heavens!

MRS. WITHERS: [*With a shrug of the shoulders.*] As long as he's a Marquess, and he's that all right, Maria Jennings don't mind the rest.

LADY WANLEY: I hope Ethel will refuse to have anything to do with him.

ROSIE: She's a dear, isn't she? I'm so fond of her, and she's simply devoted to Lewis.

LADY WANLEY: My dear, do you never say anything against any one?

ROSE: [*With a laugh.*] Seldom. Everybody's so nice.

LADY WANLEY: It must make conversation very difficult. But Ethel is a charming girl, and I shouldn't like her to fall into the hands of that disgraceful young rip.

MRS. WITHERS: She's the only one of the family who hasn't had her head turned by all the money.

LADY WANLEY: Of course you knew Mrs. Jennings before she was the exalted person she is now.

MRS. WITHERS: Bless you, I've known her all my life. We went to the Brixton High School together, and I was a bridesmaid at her wedding. Why, we used to be popping in and out of one another's houses all day long.

WITHERS: And now, if you please, she'll hardly look at us.

ABBOTT: I'm afraid people don't much like her at Taverner, but she's done everything she could for us, and they're awfully generous.

ROSIE: I don't care what anybody says about her, she's been perfectly sweet to me. She told me that I might come to the Hall whenever I wanted to, and I'm always dropping in to lunch there.

LADY WANLEY: Oh, well, if they're nice to you, I forgive them. Mrs. Jennings can cut me till she's blue in the face.

ROSIE: Oh look, there's the Count.

[A distinguished-looking old man comes out of the restaurant and walks slowly down the steps.]

LADY WANLEY: It's Adrian von Bremer. How on earth d'you know him?

ROSIE: I don't, but he's rented a place in Cheshire, and he came to church once.

LADY WANLEY: It's the Pomeranian Ambassador, you know.

MRS. WITHERS: I know him well by sight.

LADY WANLEY: I wish he'd come and talk to us. I should like to introduce Lewis to him.

HOLLAND: He's as blind as a bat. I don't suppose he'll see us.

[Meanwhile VON BREMER has reflectively put an eyeglass in his eye, and looks round as he walks out. He catches sight of LADY WANLEY, and smiling, comes up to her.]

VON BREMER: How do you do.

HOLLAND: You look as if you were just going.

VON BREMER: I am. I had my coffee in the restaurant.

LADY WANLEY: What is the news in Pomerania?

VON BREMER: None except that our Emperor is growing old. All these domestic troubles of his are breaking him down.

LADY WANLEY: Poor old thing.

HOLLAND: I suppose nothing has been heard of the Archduke Sebastian?

VON BREMER: Nothing. We've given up the search.

HOLLAND: [*To LADY WANLEY.*] You remember that affair, don't you? There was some quarrel in the domestic circle, and the Archduke Sebastian suddenly disappeared—four years ago, now, isn't it?—and hasn't been heard of since. He simply vanished into thin air.

LADY WANLEY: But how do you know he's alive?

VON BREMER: Every Christmas the Emperor receives a letter from him, sent from different parts of the world, saying he's well and happy.

LADY WANLEY: It's really very romantic. I wonder what on earth he's doing.

VON BREMER: Heaven only knows.

LADY WANLEY: Tell me, how is that nice young *attaché* of yours that I met at luncheon the other day.

VON BREMER: The nice young *attaché* has come to a bad end. I've had to send him back to Pomerania.

LADY WANLEY: Really?

VON BREMER: The story is rather entertaining. There's an American woman here who has a passion for titles, and it occurred to my *attaché* one day to introduce his valet to her as Count So-and-So. Of course she was full of attentions and immediately asked the valet to dinner. Presently the story came to my ears. I really couldn't have my *attachés* playing practical jokes of that sort, and so I sent him home.

LADY WANLEY: Poor boy, he was so nice.

VON BREMER: Good-bye.

LADY WANLEY: Oh, may I introduce Mr. Abbott to you. He's your new Vicar at Taverner. And this is Mrs. Abbott. You must be very nice to her.

VON BREMER: I'm delighted to meet you. I've heard wonderful stories of your good works in the parish.

ABBOTT: It's very kind of you to say so.

VON BREMER: [*To ROSIE.*] If you will allow me I should like to call on you when I come down to Cheshire.

ROSIE: I shall be so pleased to see you.

VON BREMER: Good-bye.

[He bows and goes out.]

ROSIE: Wasn't it nice of him to say he'd call? You know, he never goes anywhere.

WITHERS: I can see Mrs. Jennings' face when she hears that the Count has been to see you, my dear.

HOLLAND: Why do you say that?

MRS. WITHERS: The Count lives next door to them in the country, and they've moved heaven and earth to know him, but he simply won't look at them. Maria would give her eyes if he'd call on her.

ROSIE: How can you say such horrid things about her!

[During the last two or three speeches MR. and MRS.

PARKER-JENNINGS come down the steps, followed by ETHEL, VINCENT and SERLO. SERLO goes over to talk to a flashily dressed girl at another table. PARKER-JENNINGS is a little stoutish man, very common and self-assertive. His wife is of a determined appearance, vulgar, and magnificently dressed. VINCENT is showy and aggressive. ETHEL is very charming and very pretty. SERLO is quite insignificant. MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS comes down the centre of the stage, with her party, elaborately ignoring LADY WANLEY's table. ROSIE gets up and goes to her impulsively. MRS. WITHERS and her husband rise.

ROSIE: Mrs. Jennings, I am so glad to see you.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: [*Frigidly putting up her glasses.*] Mrs. Abbott.

WITHERS: Hullo, Bob, old man, how are the chicks?

PARKER-JENNINGS: We're all in the best of 'ealth, thank you.

ETHEL: [*Shaking hands with MRS. WITHERS.*] I was hoping we should have a chance of speaking to you.

MRS. WITHERS: What a picture you look, my dear! What's the matter with Vincent? Why are you trying to look as if you'd never seen me before?

VINCENT: You'll never allow me to forget you, Mrs. Withers.

MRS. WITHERS: No, I won't. And many's the time I've bathed you, my lad, in that little back room in St. John's Road, Brixton, and don't you forget that either.

ROSIE: [*Enthusiastically to MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.*] Aren't you surprised to see us here? Mr. and Mrs. Withers are giving us such a treat.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: I shouldn't 'ave thought this quite the place for a clergyman's wife to come to. I confess I'm surprised you should find time to leave your work at Taverner in order to gad about in London. \

[*ROSIE is taken aback by the snub, and her face falls.*]

ROSIE: But we're only here for a day or two. We shall be home on Thursday. I was wondering if I might come up to luncheon as Lewis has got to go out.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: I'm expecting Lord Serlo's mother and Lady Eleanor King to stay with me, so perhaps you'd better not come up to the 'all for a few days. I'm sure you understand, don't you. I don't want to 'urt your feelings, but I don't think you're quite the sort of person they'd like to meet.

[*ROSIE gives a little gasp.*]

ETHEL: [*Indignantly.*] Mother.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: I'll let you know when it's convenient for you to call. I'm afraid you're a little inclined to be pushing, my dear. You don't mind my telling you, do you? It's not quite the correct thing in a clergyman's wife.

[*She turns her back on ROSIE, who is left gasping. She tries to choke her sobs, but tears of mortification roll down her cheeks.*]

LADY WANLEY: Oh, the cad, the cad.

[*She makes ROSIE sit down and comforts her.*]

ETHEL: Mother, how could you.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Hold your tongue, Ethel. I've been wanting to give those people a lesson for some time. Where's our table, Robert?

PARKER-JENNINGS: There are some people sitting there, my dear. We shall 'ave to take this one.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Didn't you tell the waiter to reserve it? Waiter!

JACK STRAW: Yes, madam.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: You must tell those people that that table's taken.

JACK STRAW: I'm very sorry, madam. Will this one not do instead?

ETHEL: Yes, mother. Let's sit here.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: I'm not going to let people push me into any 'ole and corner they like.

VINCENT: Cheek, I call it.

PARKER-JENNINGS: Come on, sit down, mother.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: [*Unwillingly taking her seat at a vacant table.*] How often 'ave I told you not to call me mother? My name's Marion; I'm sure you ought to know it by now.

PARKER-JENNINGS: Is it? I always thought it was Maria.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: [*To JACK STRAW.*] What are you waiting there for?

JACK STRAW: I thought the gentleman wished to give an order, madam.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Why didn't you keep that table, eh?

JACK STRAW: I'm very sorry, madam, I dare say I misunderstood you.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Don't you know English?

JACK STRAW: Perfectly, madam.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: I don't know what they want to engage these dirty foreigners for, they make me sick.

ETHEL: Mother, he can hear every word you say.

PARKER-JENNINGS: Two coffees, and bring all the liqueurs you've got.

JACK STRAW: Very well, sir, cigars or cigarettes?

PARKER-JENNINGS: Bring some cigars, and none of your twopenny stinkers. Bring the most expensive cigars you've got. I'll soon show them who I am.

JACK STRAW: Very well, sir.

[*Exit.*]

ETHEL: Mother, how could you be so brutal to poor Rosie. What has she done to you?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: I wish you wouldn't call me mother, Ethel. It sounds so common. Why don't you call me mamma?

PARKER-JENNINGS: Who's 'is lordship talking to?

VINCENT: Oh, that's little Flossie Squaretoes. I'll go and give her a look up in a minute.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: I wish you were a little more like your brother, Ethel. He knows 'ow to live up to 'is position.

VINCENT: Aitches, mater, aitches.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, you always say I drop my aitches, Vincent. Well, if I do I can afford it.

VINCENT: You're wrong, mater, only the aristocracy can afford to drop their aitches.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, well, p'raps we shall be aristocracy one of these days, eh, Robert?

PARKER-JENNINGS: You leave it to me, my dear. If money can do it. . . . I say, 'is lordship lapped up that 'ock of mine at luncheon, didn't he?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: I wish you could get out of that 'abit of yours of always looking at what people eat and drink. And what if he did lap it up. You didn't put it there for people to look at, did you?

VINCENT: I say, Ethel, you needn't have turned your back on him all the time.

ETHEL: I thought he drank too much.

VINCENT: Your ideas are so beastly middle-class. You mustn't expect a man like Serlo to do things like—like the people we used to know at . . .

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: That'll do, Vincent. We all know quite well where we used to live before your father's poor uncle was taken, and you needn't refer to it. [ETHEL *shrugs her shoulders impatiently.*] It seems to me that Vincent and I are the only ones of the family who know 'ow to live up to our position. [JACK STRAW *comes up with the coffee and liqueurs. Another waiter hands round the cigars. SERLO rejoins them.*] [*Very affably.*] Come and sit by me, Lord Serlo. Now what liqueurs will you 'ave? If there's anything you fancy, you just ask for it.

[ROSIE *gives a little sob.*]

LADY WANLEY: Oh, my dear, don't, don't. You mustn't mind.

ROSIE: I feel so frightfully humiliated. She asked me to go to the hall whenever I felt inclined, and I thought she really

meant it. I never knew that I wasn't wanted. It's so awful to know that they only thought me horribly pushing.

ABBOTT: By Jove, I wish it had been one of the men. I should have liked to knock him down and stamp on him.

LADY WANLEY: My dear Lewis, how nice and unchristian of you! I always said you were just the right sort of saint for me.

MRS. WITHERS: Wouldn't you like to come away now, my dear?

ROSIE: Oh yes, I feel I want to hide myself.

LADY WANLEY: Good-bye darling, don't take it too much to heart. [*The WITHERS, ABBOTT, and ROSIE shake hands with HOLLAND and LADY WANLEY, and go out.*] Did you ever hear anything so fiendish? Oh, if I could only make that woman suffer as she's made poor little Rosie suffer. [*Suddenly LADY WANLEY gets an idea. She leans forward.*] Ambrose.

HOLLAND: What's the matter?

LADY WANLEY: I've got it.

HOLLAND: What d'you mean?

LADY WANLEY: One of these days Mrs. Jennings will give her eyes not to have insulted that poor child. I'm going to give her a lesson that she'll never forget.

HOLLAND: She deserves pretty well anything that your feminine spite can suggest.

LADY WANLEY: I can do nothing without you, Ambrose.

HOLLAND: Don't ask me to do anything very disreputable.

LADY WANLEY: I've got her in the hollow of my hand, Ambrose.

HOLLAND: Well?

LADY WANLEY: Don't you remember that story Adrian von Bremer told us about the *attaché*? Let's try it on Mrs. Jennings.

HOLLAND: But . . .

LADY WANLEY: Oh, don't make any objections. You *must* remember. He introduced his valet to a woman as a foreign nobleman of sorts.

HOLLAND: I'm bound to say I thought it a very silly trick.

LADY WANLEY: I have no patience with you. Think how exactly the punishment fits the crime. What a triumph it would be if we got Mrs. Parker-Jennings to take to her bosom . . .

HOLLAND: Who?

LADY WANLEY: Your friend the waiter. I'm sure he'll do it if you ask him. He'll look upon it as an adventure.

HOLLAND: I don't think he'd do it. He's an odd fellow.

LADY WANLEY: Oh, but ask him. There can be no harm in that.

HOLLAND: It's all very well. But one has to consider the possible complications.

LADY WANLEY: There can't be any complications. We only want to punish an insolent snob who's wantonly insulted a woman who never hurt a fly in her life.

[JACK STRAW *comes up to their table.*

JACK STRAW: Have you done with the Benedictine, sir?

LADY WANLEY: Mr. Straw, will you do something for me?

JACK STRAW: Anything in the world, madam.

LADY WANLEY: Mr. Holland tells me you're a man of spirit.

JACK STRAW: Pray tell Mr. Holland he's a man of discernment.

LADY WANLEY: Are you ready still for any adventure that comes your way?

JACK STRAW: So long as I can do it with clean hands.

LADY WANLEY: Dear me.

JACK STRAW: I daresay your ladyship thinks it odd that a waiter should have susceptibilities.

HOLLAND: Let me tell you at once that I highly disapprove of Lady Wanley's idea.

JACK STRAW: Then pray let me hear it. You always disapprove of everything that is not hopelessly commonplace.

LADY WANLEY: You told us just now that you were only temporarily engaged here.

JACK STRAW: Quite right, madam.

LADY WANLEY: You see those people over there—two women and three men?

JACK STRAW: The elder lady was so amiable as to call me a dirty foreigner.

LADY WANLEY: They're the worst sort of *parvenus*. I think they're the greatest snobs in London. I have a little grudge against them.

JACK STRAW: Yes?

LADY WANLEY: [*Slightly embarrassed.*] I want to introduce you to them—as a foreign nobleman.

JACK STRAW: [*Giving her a searching look.*] Why?

PARKER-JENNINGS: [*Loudly.*] Waiter.

LADY WANLEY: It would amuse me to see them fawn upon you. [*A pause.*]

JACK STRAW: No, I'm afraid I can't do that.

LADY WANLEY: [*Frigidly.*] Then we'll say no more about it.

PARKER-JENNINGS: [*Loudly.*] Waiter.

JACK STRAW: [*Going to him.*] Yes, sir.

PARKER-JENNINGS: Why the devil don't you hurry up. I've called three times.

JACK STRAW: [*Blandly.*] I'm very sorry, sir. I was engaged at another table.

PARKER-JENNINGS: You seem to think you can keep me waiting all day. I suppose that's why you're called a waiter.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Robert, don't make jokes with menials.

PARKER-JENNINGS: I've got a good mind to report you to the management.

ETHEL: Papa, he came as quickly as he could.

PARKER-JENNINGS: This coffee's disgusting. I don't know what you make it out of. It tastes like ditchwater.

JACK STRAW: I'm very sorry, sir. Let me get you some more.

PARKER-JENNINGS: And look sharp about it, or you'll find yourself decorated with an order you don't know in your country.

JACK STRAW: I beg your pardon, sir?

PARKER-JENNINGS: The order of the boot.

VINCENT: I can't think why they don't have English waiters in a smart hotel like this instead of these damned foreigners.

PARKER-JENNINGS: Now then, look slippery.

[JACK STRAW has fixed his eyes on ETHEL. She has been looking down. She gives him a glance. He takes the coffee things and gives them to another waiter.]

ETHEL: [Her voice trembling with indignation.] How can you talk like that to a man who can't defend himself! It's so cowardly to insult a servant who daren't answer.

VINCENT: I should think not indeed. I should like to see any servant answer me.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: You never 'ave leant 'ow to treat servants, Ethel. You always talk to them as if they was one of ourselves. I wish you could take a leaf out of Vincent's book. Treat 'em like dirt, and they'll respect you.

[JACK STRAW having given instructions to the waiter, goes to HOLLAND and LADY WANLEY.]

JACK STRAW: I'm willing to do what you asked me to.

HOLLAND: Why have you changed your mind?

JACK STRAW: To tell you the truth, I'm perfectly indifferent to the rudeness and the vulgarity of your friends, but I think I should like to know that young lady.

HOLLAND: Would you, by Jove!

JACK STRAW: When her father insulted me, the most ravishing colour came into her pale cheeks, and she looked at me with the most beautiful eyes in the world. And they were veiled with tears.

LADY WANLEY: And is that enough to make you change your mind?

HOLLAND: Fortunately Mr. Straw is not in the habit of falling in love, or I should refuse to hear anything more of this cracked-brained scheme.

LADY WANLEY: When will you be ready?

JACK STRAW: I'm ready now. It's three o'clock, and Pierre is waiting in the basement to put on this uniform.

LADY WANLEY: We couldn't find a better place than this to effect an introduction.

JACK STRAW: Give me two minutes to change my clothes, and I am at your service.

LADY WANLEY: You have indeed an adventurous spirit.

JACK STRAW: But I must make one condition—two, in fact.

LADY WANLEY: What are they?

JACK STRAW: Well, although you have glided over the point with singular discretion, it is plain that you do not want me to assume a certain character merely in order to enjoy a private snigger at the expense of these amiable people.

LADY WANLEY: I don't think I know what you mean?

JACK STRAW: Madam, it is always dangerous to count too much on the stupidity of one's fellows. We shall arrange this matter much better if you realise that I'm a person of some shrewdness.

HOLLAND: Go on.

JACK STRAW: It is evident that you wish these good folk to take me to their bosom in order that you may have the opportunity of telling them one day that I'm merely an impostor.

LADY WANLEY: I really hadn't thought about that.

JACK STRAW: I venture to suspect that you rate your intelligence too low.

LADY WANLEY: Well, what is your condition?

JACK STRAW: The position will be very humiliating to me. For all I know it may bring me into uncomfortable relations with the police.

HOLLAND: I think the whole plan had better be dropped. It will lead to endless bother.

JACK STRAW: I have no wish to drop it. You want to revenge yourself on some people who have insulted you. I, for reasons of my own, am willing to help. But I make the condition that you do not disclose the truth till I give you leave. I promise not to withhold it unreasonably.

LADY WANLEY: I accept that. And the second condition?

JACK STRAW: Is very easy. I insist that you should behave towards me, whether we're alone or in public, as you naturally would if I were really the individual I propose to personate.

LADY WANLEY: That's only fair. Now who can we suggest that you should be?

HOLLAND: You'd better try and invent some character who you're quite sure doesn't exist.

LADY WANLEY: We want something very extravagant and high-sounding.

JACK STRAW: Pray do not put yourselves to the trouble of thinking. You will introduce me to your friends as the Archduke Sebastian of Pomerania.

HOLLAND: What!

LADY WANLEY: But that's a real person!

JACK STRAW: To invent an imaginary one would be ridiculous. Your friends would only need to look in the Almanach de Gotha to discover the fraud.

LADY WANLEY: But Count von Bremer was talking to us about him just now. The Archduke Sebastian is the man who mysteriously disappeared.

JACK STRAW: It's because his whereabouts are unknown that he's the safest person to choose.

HOLLAND: You would never be able to pass yourself off for an Archduke.

JACK STRAW: Strange as it may seem to you, a royal prince eats, drinks, breathes, and behaves generally very much like men of baser clay.

LADY WANLEY: You'd be found out in a week.

JACK STRAW: But how do you know I'm not the Archduke Sebastian?

HOLLAND: [*With a scornful laugh.*] You look it.

LADY WANLEY: But you'd want a suite and all sorts of things.

JACK STRAW: The man is notoriously eccentric. I think it very likely that the company of a stuffy old Colonel of Dragoons would bore him to death.

HOLLAND: It's preposterous.

JACK STRAW: You may either take it or leave it. I will be the Archduke Sebastian or nobody.

LADY WANLEY: After all, Mrs. Jennings will probably never have heard of this trumpery Archduke.

JACK STRAW: And if she has, what more probable than that, having had enough of retirement, he should enter once more upon the position which is his by rights?

LADY WANLEY: [*Looking at HOLLAND.*] It makes the joke infinitely better.

JACK STRAW: You must make up your minds at once.

LADY WANLEY: Ambrose, let's toss. Heads it is, and tails it isn't.

HOLLAND: All right. [*He tosses a coin.*] Tails.

LADY WANLEY: I said, tails it is, didn't I? . . . I'm willing to risk it.

JACK STRAW: Give me two minutes. [*He goes out.*]

HOLLAND: Heaven only knows what will be the end of it.

[*LORD SERLO comes up to them.*]

SERLO: Hello, Ambrose. How's life? How d'ye do?

LADY WANLEY: What have you been doing?

SERLO: I've been lettin' Jennings' Patent Hardware stand me a lunch. My word, that old woman's so vulgar she just about takes the roof of your head off.

HOLLAND: Why do you lunch with people you thoroughly despise?

SERLO: Despise 'em! I don't despise people who've got eighty thousand a year. They're trying to hook me for their girl.

HOLLAND: And are you proposing to—throw yourself away?

SERLO: She's a very neat-steppin' little filly—swallowed a poker in her childhood—regrettable accident in the nursery, don't you know, but sound in wind and limb and all that sort of thing.

LADY WANLEY: I admire your romantic air.

SERLO: Whoever talked of romance? There's half a million down on one side and an old-established marquisate on the other.

HOLLAND: When is the happy event to take place?

SERLO: Well, as soon as we can get over a triflin' impediment

LADY WANLEY: What's that?

SERLO: Well, the filly's kicking. Have to put a red ribbon on her tail, don't you know.

LADY WANLEY: She's refusing the coronet you lay at her feet?

SERLO: Won't touch it with the fag end of a barge pole. I was sittin' next to her at lunch, and she simply turned her back on me—no mistakin' it, don't you know. Wouldn't let me get a word in edgeways. Mother's all over me, father's all over me, son's all over me. What's the good of that? Can't marry them. Rotten, I call it. Came over here to have a bit of a rest.

LADY WANLEY: [*Laughing.*] And how d'you like Vincent.

SERLO: Rotten bounder. Can't stick him at any price, knows too many lords for me. When he's my brother-in-law—hoof him out, don't you know—double quick march. Pretty Polly's all very well but I'm not takin' her family. Can't do it for half a million, don't you know. Must be practical.

[VINCENT comes up to them.]

VINCENT: How d'you do, Lady Wanley? I saw you driving with Lady Mary Ware yesterday. Such a nice girl, isn't she? I suppose you know her brother Tregury, don't you? Great pal of mine at Oxford.

LADY WANLEY: He's my second cousin, Mr. Jennings, and he pronounces his name Tregary.

VINCENT: Oh yes, of course. I always used to call him Tregury for fun.

LADY WANLEY: Did you?

HOLLAND: You have a very keen sense of humour.

VINCENT: I was just having an argument with the mater as to what relation he was to the Duke of Sherwin.

LADY WANLEY: I'm afraid I haven't your intimate knowledge of the peerage, but I should think the only relation they've had in common for the last two centuries is that lamented monarch, Charles II.

VINCENT: [*To SERLO.*] Nice chap, Sherwin.

SERLO: Dunno him.

VINCENT: Don't you? Not know Sherwin? I must introduce you to him. I'm sure he'd like to know you. Thorough sportsman.

SERLO: Is he?

VINCENT: Yes, rather. I saw him looking on at a cricket match the other day. Great pal of my governor's, you know. Thorough English gentleman.

SERLO: They'd get on well together.

LADY WANLEY: [*To HOLLAND.*] Here is our friend.

[*JACK STRAW comes in, hat and cane in hand. He wears a very smart suit, tail coat, grey trousers, &c.*

JACK STRAW: I'm so sorry I couldn't come to lunch with you.

[*He shakes LADY WANLEY's hand, she slightly curtsies to him. MRS. JENNINGS nudges her husband, and they both stare with all their eyes.*

LADY WANLEY: It's very good of you to have come now, sir.

JACK STRAW: Ah, my dear Holland, you are looking the picture of health.

HOLLAND: It's very kind of you, sir.

LADY WANLEY: May I present Lord Serlo to you?

JACK STRAW: [*Shaking hands with him.*] How d'you do. I think your father was ambassador in Pomerania for some time.

SERLO: Yes, he was.

HOLLAND: [*Surprised.*] How did you know that—sir?

JACK STRAW: I remember him quite well. He used to play with me when I was a little boy. I was so sorry to hear of his death.

SERLO: He wasn't a bad old buffer. Kept me dooced short of cash, though.

JACK STRAW: [*Gaily.*] But unless you introduce me to Lord Serlo he won't know who on earth I am.

LADY WANLEY: I thought every one knew, at least by sight, the—Archduke Sebastian of Pomerania.

JACK STRAW: You talk of me as if I were a notorious character. [*Meanwhile VINCENT has been making frantic signs to be introduced, coughing and shuffling on his feet. JACK STRAW looks at him through his eyeglass.*] Won't you present your friend to me?

LADY WANLEY: Mr. Vincent Parker-Jennings.

VINCENT: I'm very proud and honoured to make your Royal Highness's acquaintance.

JACK STRAW: It's very polite of you to say so.

VINCENT: I've always had a great sympathy for Pomerania. Most wonderful country in Europe, that's what I always say.

JACK STRAW: I will tell my grandfather you think so. He will be pleased and flattered.

VINCENT: I haven't ever been there, you know, sir. But I know all about it through Adrian von Bremer.

HOLLAND: [*Hastily.*] Your ambassador lives quite near Mr. Jennings.

JACK STRAW: Oh yes.

VINCENT: His place marches with ours, don't you know. He's a great pal of my people's. Jolly old thing, isn't he, sir? Thorough sportsman. That's what I call a gentleman.

JACK STRAW: I seem to know your name so well.

LADY WANLEY: Mr. Parker-Jennings is the great philanthropist. He's provided books to put in all Mr. Carnegie's free libraries.

JACK STRAW: What a noble act. I should very much like to make his acquaintance.

VINCENT: He's sitting over there with my mother and sister.
Shall I go and fetch him, sir?

JACK STRAW: It's very kind of you to take so much trouble.

HOLLAND: [*To JACK STRAW in an undertone.*] For goodness' sake be careful.

JACK STRAW: [*Putting up his eyeglass.*] I beg your pardon, I did not catch what you said. . . . Pray repeat it.

HOLLAND: [*Embarrassed.*] It was of no consequence, sir.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: [*To VINCENT.*] Who is he, Vincent?
I saw 'er curtsey to him.

VINCENT: Come along, pater. He wants to be introduced to you.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: I'm coming too, Vincent.

VINCENT: Awfully jolly chap. Archduke Sebastian. What hol

PARKER-JENNINGS: But look here, Vincent, I don't know how to talk to Royalty. How shall I address him?

VINCENT: Oh, that's all right. Say Sir wherever you can slip it in and when you can't say Royal Highness.

[*JACK STRAW comes forward a little with LADY WANLEY.*]

LADY WANLEY: This is Mrs. Parker-Jennings.

JACK STRAW: [*Shaking hands with her.*] I'm delighted to make your acquaintance. [*Turning to PARKER-JENNINGS.*] I have often heard of you, Mr. . . . Mr. . . .

LADY WANLEY: [*Prompting.*] Parker-Jennings.

JACK STRAW: [*With a relieved smile.*] Mr. Parker-Jennings. I'm sure I wish we had in my country more men of your public spirit and disinterestedness.

PARKER-JENNINGS: [*Very nervously.*] I try to do my little best, you know, sir, your Royal Highness.

JACK STRAW: Won't you introduce me to your daughter?

PARKER-JENNINGS: I'm sure, sir, your Royal Highness is very affable. Ethell

[ETHEL slowly comes forward and curtsies. He looks at her steadily, takes her hand and kisses it.

VINCENT: [*In an undertone.*] What ho!

END OF THE FIRST ACT

THE SECOND ACT

The drawing-room at Taverner, the PARKER-JENNINGS' place in Cheshire. Windows lead out on to the garden. MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS, magnificently dressed, is standing in the middle of the room. PARKER-JENNINGS comes in, rubbing his hands.

PARKER-JENNINGS: The band has come, my dear, and they're ready to start playing the moment anyone turns up.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: 'Ave you told 'em about the Pomeranian anthem?

PARKER-JENNINGS: What do you think, my dear?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: I wish you wouldn't answer me like that. Why don't you say yes or no? I can't abide these city ways of yours.

PARKER-JENNINGS: I was only being facetious, my dear.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: I should 'ave thought you'd learned by now that it's vulgar to be funny. You've never 'card a duchess make a joke, 'ave you?

[VINCENT comes in.]

VINCENT: I've just been round the refreshment tents. There's one thing, people can't say we haven't spread ourselves out.

PARKER-JENNINGS: [*Rubbing his hands.*] I 'aven't spared a single expense. The band's down from London, and the refreshments are from Gunter's. There's not a cigar on the place that cost less than one and six—and that's the wholesale price.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, we've done it well, there's no denying that. I've asked the Withers, Robert. Florrie Withers will be mad with jealousy. I shouldn't wonder

if she didn't choke with envy when she swallowed a caviar sandwich.

PARKER-JENNINGS: It was a rare stroke of business when we got the Archduke to come and stay.

VINCENT: That's through me, pater. You'd never have known him if I hadn't been on the spot.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: And I've asked Lady Wanley. I just want her to see that I can get on without her. All the county's coming. I sent 'em all cards, whether I knew 'em or not, and they've all accepted.

PARKER-JENNINGS: Don't you remember, Marion, how bucked we were in the old days when Mrs. Bromsgrove came to dine with us, because her husband was on the L.C.C.?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: I wish she could see me now. D'you remember 'ow she used to patronise me? I wish all that stuck-up lot on Brixton 'ill was here to see us 'ob-nob with the aristocracy.

PARKER-JENNINGS: It's the Archduke that done it, my dear.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: What's Serlo now? Marquis of Serlo—pooh. He isn't going to get any more opportunities from me—and if he says anything I'll just send him off with a flea in his ear.

VINCENT: Draw it mild, mater.

PARKER-JENNINGS: Your mother's a great woman, Vincent. This is the day of her life.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: I wish I 'adn't been such a fool as to ask Serlo to stay here. And it's just like that aggravating girl. When I wanted Ethel to marry him, she wouldn't so much as look at him, and now that she can have some one else for the asking, she's with 'im all day.

VINCENT: Well, I'm for the bird in the hand, mater. The Archduke don't look much like a marrying man to me.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Don't you worry about that, my dear. Every man's a marrying man when he's got a chance of a pretty girl with 'alf a million of money.

PARKER-JENNINGS: Here she is.

[ETHEL comes in with LORD SERLO.

ETHEL: The Withers have just motored over, mother.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: They would be first, wouldn't they? I expect Florrie Withers was waiting on the doorstep till the clock struck four. Where's his Royal Highness?

ETHEL: I don't know at all.

SERLO: He's asleep in the garden; he's sittin' in the most comfortable arm-chair in the place, with another for each of his legs, and he's clasping in his hands what looks suspiciously like a very long gin and soda to me.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Well, somebody must go and wake him up. I've asked 'alf the county to meet him, and he can't go on sleeping.

[JACK STRAW comes in.

JACK STRAW: I say, what have you got a beastly band playing the Pomeranian anthem for? Woke me up. I was having such a jolly sleep too.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: [*Very affably.*] The people are just coming, sir.

JACK STRAW: What people?

PARKER-JENNINGS: All the very best people in Cheshire, sir —no outsiders to-day. What hol

JACK STRAW: Good lord, are you giving a party?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Don't you remember, sir? I asked if I might invite a few friends to meet you.

JACK STRAW: Oh, yes.—Lady Wanley and Holland. I thought we might have a jolly little game of bridge in the garden? What have you got the village band in for?

VINCENT: That's not the village band, sir. That's the Royal Blue Orchestra.

PARKER-JENNINGS: Cost me £150 to have them down, Special train from London, and I don't know what all.

VINCENT: Shut up, pater. You needn't tell everyone how much you paid for things.

JACK STRAW: How many do you expect?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh—only my most intimate friends—about . . .

JACK STRAW: Yes?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Well, about three hundred and fifty.

JACK STRAW: By George, that's cheerful. D'you want me to shake hands with them all?

PARKER-JENNINGS: They're the very best people in the county, sir. *Crème de la crème.*

[*A servant enters to announce Mr. and Mrs. Withers. They come in.*]

SERVANT: Mr. and Mrs. Withers.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: How d'you do? It's so nice of you to come before anyone else.

MRS. WITHERS: We know you're not used to these grand affairs, Maria, and we thought you might want a couple of old friends to do something for you.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, thank you. But there are plenty of servants. May I introduce Mr. and Mrs. Withers to your Royal 'Ighness.

JACK STRAW: How d'you do.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: We were just going into the garden. I daresay people will begin to come presently.

[*They all go out except ETHEL and LORD SERLO.*]

SERLO: I say, I'm going to hook it to-morrow.

ETHEL: Are you? I'm very sorry.

SERLO: I wish I thought that.

ETHEL: Why are you going so soon?

SERLO: Your respected mother has given your humble notice to quit.

ETHEL: What do you mean?

SERLO: Look here, let's be frank with one another, shall we?

ETHEL: Aren't we always?

SERLO: Well, if you ask me point blank, anythin' but.

ETHEL: Then let us be frank at once.

SERLO: Well, ten days ago your people were all over me. I suppose you know why as well as I do.

ETHEL: D'you think we need talk of that?

SERLO: Frankness is rather tryin', ain't it?

ETHEL: No. Please go on.

SERLO: It was dear Lord Serlo all day long; they couldn't have enough of me. Rippin' good chap, Serlo. Just the sort of cove one would like to have for a son-in-law.

ETHEL: Lord Serlo!

SERLO: Half a mo. I ain't done yet. Eminently suitable match, and all that sort of thing, only the young lady couldn't stick me at any price.

ETHEL: I don't know why you should say this.

SERLO: Better have it out, you know; rotten, keepin' things on your chest. Don't blame the young lady. Don't know that I should much fancy myself if I was a blushing damsel. Not everybody's money. Got a bit damaged in transit, eh, what? Been mixed up in one or two scandals. Not the right thing for an old-established marquess. Bit inclined to drink. No harm in him, you know, but not the sort of man you'd like to spend the rest of your life with. Young woman got a mind of her own. Lets the noble lord see she wouldn't take him if he was given

away with a pound of tea. All right, says noble lord, bet's off. Not much, says mother of young woman. Half a million goin' beggin'. Give her time to get used to you. Fascinating cove really. More she knows you more she'll like you. Come down and stay in the country.

ETHEL: [*With a laugh.*] How can you talk such nonsense!

SERLO: All right, says noble lord, I'm on. Jolly nice girl, and all that sort of thing. Noble lord rather smit. Thinks if she'll have him he'll turn over a new leaf—give up everythin' rotten and try and make her a good husband. Rather taken with the idea of double harness. He may look a fool, but noble lord knows a good thing when he sees it, and the young lady's about the best thing he's ever set eyes on.

ETHEL: Are you talking seriously by any chance?

SERLO: Now don't interrupt me. I've just got into a good steady canter, and I'll get it all off my chest at once.

ETHEL: I'm so sorry.

SERLO: Well, when eligible marquess gets down in the country, what d'you think he finds? Blessed if there ain't a foreign prince on the scene. My word, that's enough to put the noble lord's aristocratic nose right out of joint, ain't it? Look here, old boy, you keep your weather eye open, and all that sort of thing, says the noble lord to himself. May be an ass, don't you know, but when there's a bloomin' hurricane comin' along he can see which way the wind is blowin'. Brother rather chilly, father rather chilly, mother regular iceberg. All right, says noble lord to himself, but what about Pretty Polly?

ETHEL: Is that me by any chance?

SERLO: For the last month Pretty Polly had been simply turnin' her back on noble lord, snubbin' him right and left, and all of a sudden she becomes extraordinary affable. Hulloo, what's this, says noble lord, and his

little heart goes pit-a-pat. He may be a fool, but he ain't a damned fool, and in a day or two he tumbles to it. So, like a wise man, he packs his bag and hooks it.

ETHEL: I don't know what on earth you mean?

SERLO: Don't you? Well, will you have it straight from the shoulder?

ETHEL: We agreed to be quite frank.

SERLO: All right. No spoof. My dear, I just saw that you were fairly knocked silly by the Archduke, and there wasn't a ghost of a chance for little Ned Serlo.

ETHEL: It's not true.

SERLO: Oh, yes, it is. You see, I'm a bit knocked silly myself, and that makes you precious far-sighted.

ETHEL: You!

SERLO: All right, you needn't get up on your hind legs. I'm not goin' to propose to you now. I know it would be no precious good. At first I didn't care twopence; it was just a business arrangement—half a million down on one side and an old-established marquisate on the other. But now. . . . Well, you know I'm rather an ass at saying what I mean—when I really mean it.

ETHEL: I'm very sorry. I'm afraid I've been unkind to you.

SERLO: Oh, no, you haven't. I do seem a rotten little bounder, don't I?

ETHEL: No, I think you might be an awfully good friend.

SERLO: It's jolly of you to say so. You know, I can't stick your family. Can you?

ETHEL: [*Smiling.*] You see, I knew them before they were rich. When you've lived all your life in a sordid narrow way, it's very hard to have such enormous wealth as ours.

SERLO: You make allowances for them, but you never did for me.

ETHEL: It would have been very impertinent of me.

SERLO: It never struck you that it's devilish hard to be a marquess with no means of livelihood but your title. And the worst of a title is that it'll get you plenty of credit, but dooced little hard cash.

ETHEL: I never thought of that.

SERLO: Well, look here, what I wanted to say is this: it's no business of mine about the Archduke. You know, I don't know much about royalty, but I don't think a foreign prince is likely to marry the daughter of nobody in particular just because she's got nice eyes and a pot of money. [ETHEL *is about to speak.*] No, let me go on. You may be going to have a rotten time, and I just want you to know that if at any time you want me—well, you know what I mean, don't you. Let's forget that you're an heiress, and I'm an old-established marquess. You're an awfully ripping sort, and I'm just Ned Serlo. I'm not a bad sort either, and perhaps we might be happy together.

ETHEL: [*Touched.*] It's very charming of you. I'm so glad that I know you better now. Whatever happens I know I can count on you.

SERLO: That's all right then. Meanwhile noble lord's goin' to hook it—leave the coast clear, and bear it like a man, don't you know.

[*Enter JACK STRAW.*]

JACK STRAW: Well, how are the weather and the crops?

SERLO: [*Rather surprised.*] Blessed if I know, sir.

JACK STRAW: I merely asked because you looked as if you'd been discussing them.

[*He gives SERLO a glance. SERLO shows no sign of moving.*]

JACK STRAW: I'm not driving you away, am I?

SERLO: [*Getting up.*] Not at all, sir. I thought I'd go and have a look at the party.

JACK STRAW: Do go and pretend you're me, there's a good

fellow, and shake hands with some of those confounded people. You'll see where I ought to stand, because there's a little piece of red carpet on the lawn.

SERLO: I'm afraid they're not takin' any of me, sir. [*Exit.*]

JACK STRAW: The only advantage I've ever been able to find in being a royal personage is that when anybody's in your way you just tell him to go, and he goes.

ETHEL: Why did you want Lord Serlo to go, sir?

JACK STRAW: Because I wanted to be alone with you. Ask me another, quickly.

ETHEL: Oughtn't I to help mother to receive people?

JACK STRAW: I'm sure you ought. But, you see, that's another advantage of being a royal personage, that you can't go till I give you your dismissal. I say, don't you hate parties?

ETHEL: Dreadfully.

JACK STRAW: So do I. Let's pretend there isn't one, shall we? I say, why don't you sit down and make yourself comfy?

ETHEL: I should like to have a little talk with you, sir.

JACK STRAW: That's jolly. I wish we had a regiment of soldiers there to turn all those people out.

ETHEL: May I say anything I like to you, sir?

JACK STRAW: Good heavens, why not?

ETHEL: Until I was sixteen the most exalted person I'd ever met in my life was a London County Councillor. I'm not quite sure if I know how to behave with royal personages.

JACK STRAW: Why on earth don't you buy a book on etiquette? I always carry one about with me.

ETHEL: Mother bought several when you said you'd come down.

JACK STRAW: I wonder if she's got the same as mine. You know I never can remember to call a serviette a napkin.

ETHEL: Mamma's very particular about that.

JACK STRAW: And look here, d'you know that you ought never to call a chicken a fowl? It's awfully bad form. I wonder if that's in your mother's books. I say, what charming eyes you have.

ETHEL: That's another of the advantages of being a royal personage, that you can make pretty speeches, and no one takes them seriously.

JACK STRAW: But you know, I'm a very insignificant royal personage. You mustn't think I'm anything very grand really.

ETHEL: It's very nice of you to say so.

JACK STRAW: You see, there are seventy-nine archdukes and duchesses in Pomerania. My grandfather had seventeen children, and they all married. How many children would each have had to make seventy-nine of us?

ETHEL: It sounds very difficult.

JACK STRAW: But you see I can't be very important, can I? And of course I've got practically no money to speak of.

ETHEL: It's very good of you to put me at my ease. Then you won't mind if I say exactly what I want to?

JACK STRAW: You won't give me good advice, will you? I've got seventy-nine relations, and they all do that.

ETHEL: I wouldn't venture.

JACK STRAW: I'll bear whatever else you say with fortitude. We'll pretend that you're just Miss So-and-So.

ETHEL: As in point of fact, I am.

JACK STRAW: And that I'm—Jack Straw.

ETHEL: [*Surprised.*] Why on earth Jack Straw?

JACK STRAW: [*Indifferently.*] It's the name of a public-house in Hampstead. Pray go on.

ETHEL: I wondered if you'd do me a great favour.

JACK STRAW: Ask me for the moon, and it shall be left at your front door by Carter Paterson to-morrow morning.

ETHEL: It's something much simpler than that.

JACK STRAW: Put me out of suspense quickly.

ETHEL: I should be very much obliged if—if you'd go away.

JACK STRAW: [*Much surprised.*] I? Now?

ETHEL: I didn't mean actually this minute. But if it suited your arrangements to go to-morrow. . . .

JACK STRAW: You don't mean to say you want me to go away altogether?

ETHEL: That is precisely what I did mean.

JACK STRAW: Couldn't you ask me something easier than that? Ask me for a lawyer who never told a lie, and I'll deliver him to you, bound hand and foot.

ETHEL: I don't happen to want one just at this moment, thank you.

JACK STRAW: But I'm having a very jolly time down here.

ETHEL: [*With a change of tone.*] Don't you see that you're exposing me every day to the most cruel humiliation?

JACK STRAW: I thought I was making myself so pleasant.

ETHEL: Oh, don't pretend you don't understand. I've seen the twinkle in your eyes when my mother set a little trap for you to fall in.

JACK STRAW: I always fell in very neatly.

ETHEL: But what do you think I felt when I knew how clearly you saw that she was throwing me at your head?

JACK STRAW: It's a distinctly pleasing sensation to have a pretty girl thrown at your head.

ETHEL: It was only a joke to you; you don't know how ashamed I was.

JACK STRAW: But why do you suppose I came down to Taverner—to see your father and mother?

ETHEL: I don't know why you came—unless it was to make me desperately wretched.

JACK STRAW: What would you say if I told you that I came because I loved you at first sight?

ETHEL: I should say that your Royal Highness was very polite.

JACK STRAW: Now, look here, don't you think I'm rather nice, really?

ETHEL: It would surely be very impertinent of me to have any opinion on the subject.

JACK STRAW: Our friend Serlo would describe that as one in the eye.

ETHEL: Would you allow me to go back to my mother's guests, sir?

JACK STRAW: [*Imperturbably.*] Do you think you'd like me any better if I weren't an Archduke?

ETHEL: I haven't thought about it.

JACK STRAW: Then please give the matter your immediate attention.

ETHEL: I should certainly like you no less.

JACK STRAW: I have no doubt that if I were just a penniless adventurer you'd simply dote upon me.

ETHEL: I don't know if I'd put it quite so strongly as that.

JACK STRAW: You know, I'm afraid you're hopelessly romantic. You've confessed your attachment to me, and just because I happen incautiously to have chosen an Emperor for my grandfather, you want me to go away. It's so unreasonable.

ETHEL: But I haven't confessed anything of the sort.

JACK STRAW: I look upon your request that I should go away as equivalent to an avowal of undying passion.

ETHEL: Shall I tell you what I would say to you if you weren't an Archduke?

JACK STRAW: Yes.

ETHEL: I'd say you were the most audacious, impudent, and impertinent man I'd ever seen in my life.

[She gives a rapid, ironical curtsey, and goes out. He is about to follow her when LADY WANLEY and HOLLAND come in. JACK STRAW stops and shakes hands with them.]

JACK STRAW: Ah, I was hoping to have the pleasure of seeing you. You wrote me a little note, Mr. Holland.

HOLLAND: *[Ironically.]* I ventured to ask if I might have a few minutes' private conversation with you.

JACK STRAW: Perhaps you wouldn't mind waiting here. I will rejoin you immediately. *[He goes out.]*

HOLLAND: You know, he positively freezes me.

LADY WANLEY: I think it's wonderful. One couldn't suspect for a moment that he's only. . . .

HOLLAND: Take care. *[He looks round.]*

LADY WANLEY: No one will come here. We can talk quite safely.

HOLLAND: I wish to goodness we hadn't ever thought of this fool trick. I knew it would lead to all sorts of bother.

LADY WANLEY: It's no good saying that now. We must keep our heads and get out of it as best we can.

HOLLAND: What are you going to do?

LADY WANLEY: Oh, that's just like a man. You're trying to put the whole blame on me. What are *you* going to do?

HOLLAND: Well, we must finish with it as quickly as we can.

LADY WANLEY: Whatever happens, there must be no scene. I couldn't bear to see him publicly humiliated.

HOLLAND: Why on earth should you think of him?

LADY WANLEY: Oh, I'm such a fool, Ambrose.

HOLLAND: My dear, what *do* you mean?

LADY WANLEY: After all, I'm not a girl— I'm the mother of two healthy boys with enormous appetites. I think the man has bewitched me.

HOLLAND: Good Lord!

LADY WANLEY: It's no good saying that. Of course he's the most fascinating creature I've ever seen in my life.

HOLLAND: You don't mean to say you're seriously in love with him?

LADY WANLEY: A widow with a sense of humour is never seriously in love with anybody.

HOLLAND: Well?

LADY WANLEY: But I think it's much better the young man should disappear as mysteriously as he came.

HOLLAND: There we're quite agreed. And we'll tell him so with considerable frankness.

[Enter JACK STRAW.

JACK STRAW: Now, my dear people, I am at your service.

[HOLLAND and LADY WANLEY are sitting down. JACK STRAW looks at HOLLAND, who rises uneasily.

HOLLAND: Oh, don't be such an ass, Jack.

JACK STRAW: [*Frigidly.*] I beg your pardon. [*Pause.*] Perhaps you'd be good enough to put down my hat.

[HOLLAND takes it and flings it crossly on a chair.

JACK STRAW: I don't think you're in a very good humour this afternoon, Mr. Holland. I venture to think your manners leave something to be desired.

HOLLAND: Look here, we've had enough of this tomfoolery.

JACK STRAW: Pray sit down. It distresses me to see you standing.

HOLLAND: I believe the man's out of his senses.

LADY WANLEY: [*Very amiably.*] Have you forgotten the waiter's uniform which fitted you so wonderfully, Mr. Straw?

JACK STRAW: [*Calmly.*] Quite. I only remember the condition your ladyship was good enough to agree to, when I accepted your humorous suggestion.

HOLLAND: But, look here, we must talk the matter out.

JACK STRAW: I am quite willing to listen to you, my dear Holland. Your conversation is often interesting and sometimes epigrammatic. I stipulate only that you should use those forms of politeness which are usual between a person of your position and a person of mine.

HOLLAND: I should never have consented to this folly if I'd known to what it was going to lead. In a moment of uncontrollable irritation, because Mrs. Jennings had behaved with the greatest insolence to a defenceless girl, we made up our minds to punish her. There was no great harm in it. We thought perhaps she'd ask you to dinner, and there would be an end of it. It never dawned on us that you'd come and stay here indefinitely.

JACK STRAW: My dear fellow, why should you blame me for your own lack of intelligence?

HOLLAND: [*Impatiently.*] Ugh!

[JACK STRAW goes over and sits beside LADY WANLEY.

JACK STRAW: Our friend is quite incoherent, isn't he?

LADY WANLEY: We want you to go away, sir.

JACK STRAW: Do you? I say, what a jolly frock. Where did you get it?

LADY WANLEY: [*With a little laugh, disarmed by his impudence.*] You're perfectly irresistible.

JACK STRAW: You've taken the words out of my mouth, that's just what I was going to say to you.

LADY WANLEY: Are you ever serious?

JACK STRAW: Always when I'm talking to a pretty woman.

LADY WANLEY: I wish I could understand you.

JACK STRAW: My dear lady, I've been trying to understand

myself for the last thirty odd years. By the way, how old am I, Holland?

HOLLAND: How the deuce should I know?

JACK STRAW: Well, my dear fellow, I think it's very careless of you. You might have looked it out. Supposing some one had asked me my age?

LADY WANLEY: I wish you really were a royal personage.

JACK STRAW: It does seem hard that a waiter should have such a way with him, doesn't it?

LADY WANLEY. [*Confidentially.*] Who are you really?

JACK STRAW: Your devoted servant, madam. Who could be anything else after knowing you for ten minutes?

LADY WANLEY: It's charming of you to say so.

JACK STRAW: I am very nice, aren't I?

LADY WANLEY: Much too nice. That is why I beseech your Royal Highness graciously to take his departure.

JACK STRAW: You know, you haven't yet told me where you got that frock.

LADY WANLEY: Oh, I bought it in Paris. Do you like it?

JACK STRAW: It's ripping. And it suits you admirably.

HOLLAND: Isabel, Isabel, we came here to be sensible.

LADY WANLEY: My dear Ambrose, let me be sensible in my own way.

JACK STRAW: Oh, my dear Holland, I wonder if you'd very much mind going to see if my red carpet is still in its place.

HOLLAND: I'm not going to be made a fool of by you, my friend.

JACK STRAW: Why not? You're doing it very well.

LADY WANLEY: Don't be piggy, Ambrose.

HOLLAND: What on earth do you want me to do?

LADY WANLEY: I'm simply dying of thirst. I wish you'd get me a glass of lemonade.

HOLLAND: I have no intention whatever of stirring from this spot.

JACK STRAW: I've been wondering for the last week what I should do if I signified his dismissal to anyone, and he flatly refused to go. Very awkward, isn't it?

LADY WANLEY: Mahomet and the mountain isn't in it.

JACK STRAW: Of course a hundred years ago I'd have cast him into a dungeon. But, between ourselves, I don't happen to have a dungeon handy.

HOLLAND: Now look here, we've had enough of this nonsense. The joke has gone far enough. Are you going or not?

JACK STRAW: Well, if you ask me point blank, I'm not.

HOLLAND: But don't you know that I have only to say two words for you to be kicked out of the house by the servants?

JACK STRAW: You forget that you'd be undoubtedly kicked out with me.

HOLLAND: Now look here, Jack, we've been old pals, and we've gone through a deuce of a lot together. I don't want to say beastly things to you. I know I've made a fool of myself, but you're a decent chap. You must see that it's necessary for you to go at once.

JACK STRAW: I cannot for the life of me see anything of the sort. I have no other engagements, and the country is charming at this time of year.

HOLLAND: You're behaving like a common imposter.

JACK STRAW: What language to use to a royal personage! I assure you we're not used to such frankness.

HOLLAND: Do you deliberately refuse to go?

JACK STRAW: Deliberately.

HOLLAND: And shall I tell you why?

JACK STRAW: I happen to know, thank you.

HOLLAND: You're going to commit the most disgraceful action of your life. Do you think anyone can't see that you're madly in love with Ethel Jennings?

LADY WANLEY: [*Springing to her feet.*] Is that true?

JACK STRAW: Quite.

LADY WANLEY: Then why have you been flirting with me so disgracefully?

JACK STRAW: I assure you I had no intention of doing so. It must be my unfortunate manner.

LADY WANLEY: It's an unfortunate manner that's quite likely to get you into trouble with widow ladies.

JACK STRAW: In that case you can only applaud my determination to marry as quickly as possible.

HOLLAND: Not Ethel Jennings?

LADY WANLEY: You must be joking?

JACK STRAW: My dear madam, when I make a joke I always laugh quickly, so that there should be no doubt about it.

HOLLAND: It's preposterous. I shall allow you to do nothing of the sort.

JACK STRAW: My dear fellow, what is the use of getting violently excited about it? More especially as I haven't yet proposed to the young lady.

HOLLAND: I think you must be stark staring mad. You don't suppose for a moment that we shall allow you to carry out such an odious deception. I can't imagine how you can even think of anything so heartless and cruel.

LADY WANLEY: It's going too far. You must understand that it's impossible. I beseech you to leave Taverner immediately.

JACK STRAW: It drives me to distraction that I should have to refuse your smallest whim, but in this matter [*with a dramatic flourish*] I am adamant.

HOLLAND: Now, look here, we've talked about it enough.

Either you leave this place immediately or I shall tell Mrs. Jennings the whole story.

JACK STRAW: It is only fair to give you that satisfaction. That was part of our arrangement.

HOLLAND: You realise the consequences?

JACK STRAW: [*Very amiably.*] I did that before I entered into your scheme.

HOLLAND: You leave me no alternative.

JACK STRAW: My dear Holland, I really believe you're rather nervous about the disclosure which it is evidently your duty to make.

HOLLAND: For your own sake I ask you once more: will you give me your word of honour to leave the house and under no circumstances communicate with any member of the family?

JACK STRAW: It's charming of you to give me one more chance. I can only repeat that I am deeply in love with Ethel, and I have every intention of marrying her.

HOLLAND: Your blood be upon your own head.

JACK STRAW: If I perish, I perish.

[HOLLAND goes to the door.]

LADY WANLEY: No, Ambrose, I beseech you not to.

HOLLAND: Good heavens, the whole thing was done so that you might have an opportunity to crow over Mrs. Jennings. Now you're going to have it.

LADY WANLEY: But I don't want it any more. It was a foolish thing. Let him go quietly.

HOLLAND: But, you see, he won't go.

[Enter MR. and MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.]

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, your Royal 'Ighness, we've been looking for you everywhere. We couldn't make out what 'ad become of you.

PARKER-JENNINGS: All the county is there. *Crème de la crème.*

[VINCENT comes in hurriedly.]

VINCENT: I say, mater, what on earth are you doing? Hurry up, the duchess has just driven up. . . . Oh, I beg your pardon, sir. I didn't know you were there.

HOLLAND: Vincent, go and fetch your sister. I have something important to say that it is necessary for her to hear.

VINCENT: But look here, the duchess has just . . .

HOLLAND: Oh, hang the duchess. Where's Ethel?

VINCENT: She's sitting just outside, talking to Serlo.

HOLLAND: Then call her.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: [*Looking round with astonishment.*]
'As anythin' 'appened?

[VINCENT goes out, and in a moment returns with ETHEL and SERLO.]

LADY WANLEY: [*To HOLLAND.*] Ambrose, be gentle.

PARKER-JENNINGS: Your Royal Highness isn't put out about anything?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: [*Quickly.*] Oh, I 'ope we 'aven't made any *faux pas*.

JACK STRAW: Nothing has happened to displease me. I'm in the best possible humour, thank you.

HOLLAND: [*Seeing ETHEL.*] Oh, there you are. [*Addressing himself to the company in general.*] I have something very painful to say, and I don't know how I'm going to make it clear to you.

SERLO: I say, is this any business of mine? Shall I hook it?

JACK STRAW: Oh no, pray stay by all means.

LADY WANLEY: [*To JACK STRAW.*] Haven't you changed your mind, sir?

JACK STRAW: I'm like a historical character whose name I can't remember at the moment. I never change my mind.

HOLLAND: Mrs. Jennings, I'm afraid there's no use in my trying to excuse myself. I had better just tell you everything as shortly as I can.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Mr. Holland, don't you think it can wait till later? The duchess 'as just come, and it'll look so funny if I'm not there to receive her.

JACK STRAW: Mr. Holland has a communication to make which cannot fail to interest you.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, of course, if it's your Royal 'Ighness's wish.

HOLLAND: I daresay you remember that a fortnight ago we all met at the Grand Babylon Hotel.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: How could I forget, when that was the auspicious occasion of my introduction to his Royal 'Ighness.

LADY WANLEY: Ambrose.

HOLLAND: You may remember, also, that Mr. and Mrs. Abbott were sitting with us in the lounge.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: I 'ave other things to do than to remember where Mr. and Mrs. Abbott were sitting.

HOLLAND: I daresay you've forgotten that you behaved very cruelly to her. We were all very indignant. We thought it necessary to punish you.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Really, Mr. Holland, I don't know who you think you're talking to.

HOLLAND: I find it very difficult to say what I have to—I realise now that the whole business has been preposterously silly—I can manage far better if you don't interrupt.

JACK STRAW: Please let him go on, Mrs. Jennings.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, of course, if your Royal 'Ighness wishes it I 'ave no more to say.

HOLLAND: It struck me that it would be amusing to pass off a nobody as a person of great consequence. I had just

recognised one of the waiters as an old friend of mine. I introduced him to you as the Archduke Sebastian of Pomerania.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: What! Then . . . ?

[She is at a loss for words. SERLO goes into a bout of laughter. The next four speeches are said very quickly, almost simultaneously.]

SERLO: What a sell! By George, what a sell!

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: *[Going up to JACK STRAW.]* Do you mean to say you're not. . . .

VINCENT: I thought I knew his face the moment I saw him.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Speak, man, speak.

JACK STRAW: *[With the greatest urbanity.]* Madam, I stepped out of the uniform of a waiter at the Grand Babylon Hotel into the sober garb of the person you now see before you.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Then you're nothing short of an impostor. Oh! Oh! Now then, Jennings, you're a man. Do something.

PARKER-JENNINGS: And he's been lappin' up my best champagne lunch and dinner for a week.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, damn your champagne.

VINCENT: Mater!

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, you fool, you fool! You've 'ad the education. You've been to Oxford, and we gave you four thousand a year. Didn't you learn enough to tell the difference between an archduke and a waiter?

VINCENT: Serlo didn't spot him.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Who's Serlo? Fine marquess he is —spends all his time with stable boys and barmaids. How do I know he is a marquess?

SERLO: Don't mind me, will you?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Is there no one who can do something? And that man stands there as if he didn't care a ball of worsted. Don't you be too sure, my young friend. It's your Royal 'Ighness this, and you Royal 'Ighness that. And we had to call you sir. Waiter, 'alf a pint of bitter, and look sharp about it.

ETHEL: Mother!

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, don't talk to me. [*To JACK STRAW.*] Well, what have you got to say?

JACK STRAW: My dear lady, you're so voluble, it would be difficult for me to get a word in edgeways.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Well, I'm listening.

JACK STRAW: Ah, there you have me, for in point of fact I can think of no appropriate observation.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: And you're been laughing at me all the time, 'ave you? Well, you're going to laugh on the other side of your face now, young feller-my-lad.

JACK STRAW: I shall be interested to see how one performs that very curious operation.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Well, shall I tell you who'll show you?

JACK STRAW: Yes, do.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: The police, my lad, the police.

JACK STRAW: I wouldn't send for them if I were you.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Wouldn't you?

JACK STRAW: I wouldn't really.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Well, I would.

JACK STRAW: Don't you think it'll be a little awkward with all these people here?

VINCENT: We can't have a scene now, mater.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: D'you mean to say I've got to sit still and lump it?

JACK STRAW: If you ask my advice, that is what I should recommend.

PARKER-JENNINGS: All the county's here, Maria. *Crème de la crème.*

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, I wish they were all dead. I know why they come here. D'you think I don't know that they call me a vulgar old woman behind my back? But they come all the same because I've got two millions of money. I'm so rich that they can't 'elp coming.

JACK STRAW: You know, I don't want to seem stuck up, but in point of fact they've come to-day to meet me. Don't you think I'd better go and make myself amiable to them?

HOLLAND: You don't mean to say you're going back to them?

JACK STRAW: Why not?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: 'Ave I got to introduce you to the duchess?

JACK STRAW: I'm afraid she'll make a point of it. Even duchesses have a weakness for royal personages.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: If she ever finds out!

JACK STRAW: The situation is not without an element of humour.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Well, upon my soul, you 'ave got a cheek!

JACK STRAW: The motto on my coat of arms is audacity. Only we put it in Latin because it sounds better.

VINCENT: Your coat of arms, I like that.

JACK STRAW: My dear fellow, I have no doubt it is as authentic as yours.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: And do you mean to say I've got to pretend I don't know anything?

JACK STRAW: I think it's the only thing to do.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: I can never do it. I shall never 'old up my 'ead again.

JACK STRAW: Come. I am convinced that the duchess is growing restive. I will murmur a few soft nothings in her ear.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, well, I suppose the only thing is to risk it. But you just wait, young man, you wait.

JACK STRAW: I think I can promise you that no one here will—blow the gaff.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Upon my soul, you talk as if I was the criminal.

[She starts and stops suddenly with a cry.]

HOLLAND: What's the matter?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, it give me such a turn. What's to be done now? The Count.

HOLLAND: How d'you mean?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: I'd forgotten all about him. Count von Bremer is coming.

JACK STRAW: Who the deuce is he?

HOLLAND: He's your ambassador.

JACK STRAW: Of course, how stupid of me!

LADY WANLEY: *[With a little scornful smile.]* But he won't come.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Don't you make too sure about that. He's coming right enough. The British aristocracy was quite willing to 'ob-nob with the Parker-Jennings, but this dirty foreigner wouldn't be seen in the same street with us. And you all sniggered up your sleeves, because you thought you was getting a bit of your own back. But I've got 'im to-day, and I was going to fling him in your faces. I wrote 'im a personal letter—as if I'd known him all my life—and said . . .

JACK STRAW: Well?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: And said 'is Royal 'Ighness particularly wished him to come. I sent the letter by one of the footmen this morning.

JACK STRAW: By Jovel

HOLLAND: Well, they mustn't meet. You must say that the Archduke has been seized with sudden indisposition.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Everyone knows he was quite well half an hour ago.

LADY WANLEY: Besides, Count von Bremer would probably insist on seeing him. It must have come as a great surprise that the Archduke Sebastian had turned up.

JACK STRAW: My dear people, don't put yourselves out. If Count von Bremer has come here to see me, it would be manifestly most discourteous to rob him of that pleasure.

HOLLAND: I think you're quite mad, Jack.

JACK STRAW: Unless I'm greatly mistaken, Count von Bremer has excessively bad sight.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: You don't mean to say you're going to meet 'im face to face?

JACK STRAW: Remember that there are eighty-one Archdukes in Pomerania.

ETHEL: You told me seventy-nine a little while ago.

JACK STRAW: I have since seen in the paper that the Archduchess Anastasia has had twins, which makes eighty-one. What more probable than that the Ambassador has never seen the Archduke Sebastian?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS. Oh, but what a risk to take. It's enough to turn my false 'air grey.

JACK STRAW: In any case, he can't have set eyes on him for four years, because nobody has.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: I suppose it 'asn't struck you that he may talk to you in Pomeranian.

JACK STRAW: Have you ever met a waiter who couldn't discourse fluently in seven languages at least?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Does that mean you can talk the Count's beastly language?

JACK STRAW: Like a beastly native, madam. But I may suggest to you that there will be no need, since if I address the Count in English it would be the height of discourtesy for him to answer in any other tongue.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Well, of all the cheek I've ever come across in my life, you just about take the cake.

HOLLAND: But look here, I remember seeing the Archduke described as a very handsome man.

JACK STRAW: Spare my blushes, dear friend. We are as like as two peas.

[Mrs. Withers comes in.]

MRS. WITHERS: Maria, the Count is looking for you everywhere. [Seeing JACK STRAW.] Oh, I beg your pardon, sir.

JACK STRAW: Not at all.

MRS. WITHERS: He's just coming along with Mr. Withers.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: [In an aside to JACK STRAW.] Try and behave like a gentleman.

[Enter COUNT ADRIAN VON BREMER and WITHERS.]

JACK STRAW: My dear Count!

COUNT: This is a welcome surprise, sir.

JACK STRAW: You know my hostess?

COUNT: [Shaking hands with MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.] How do you do?

JACK STRAW: It is many years since we met.

COUNT: I should have never recognised you, sir.

JACK STRAW: I expect I had a moustache when you last saw me.

COUNT: That changes a face so much. And then I am so blind nowadays.

JACK STRAW: I daresay you have later news of the Emperor than I.

COUNT: It will be a great pleasure to His Majesty to know that you are in England, sir. I have ventured to telegraph to him.

JACK STRAW: Have you, by Jove!

COUNT: It was my duty to do so.

JACK STRAW: I daresay you have several things you want to talk to me about?

COUNT: I was hoping you would give me a few minutes conversation.

JACK STRAW: [*To Mrs. PARKER-JENNINGS.*] Will you forgive us if we take a little stroll in the rose garden?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: [*Grimly.*] I am much honoured, sir, that your Royal Highness should condescend to walk in my rose garden.

JACK STRAW: Come. [*He takes the COUNT's arm. At the door the COUNT hesitates.*] No, I pray you. I am at home here—the most comfortable, hospitable home I have known for many a long day.

COUNT: Do you propose to stay in these parts much longer, sir?

JACK STRAW: I shall stay till Mrs. Parker-Jennings turns me out.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: You do us a great honour, sir. [*The COUNT goes out. Just as he is going JACK STRAW turns round and gives MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS an elaborate wink. Furiously.*] You, you, you, you, damned waiter!

END OF THE SECOND ACT

THE THIRD ACT

The SCENE is the same as in the preceding ACT.

Next morning.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS and VINCENT are discovered.

VINCENT: Where's the governor?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: He's 'aving an interview with the waiter.

VINCENT: I hope he'll give him what for.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: You trust your father for that.
Oh, I thought I should never get through last night.
Eighteen people to dinner, and me on pins and needles
the whole time.

VINCENT: There's a ripping long account of the Garden
Party in the *Cheshire Times*.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Do you think I've not seen it?

VINCENT: It went off beautifully; no one can deny that
There wasn't a hitch.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: [*With a little cry of rage.*] Oh!

[*Enter MR. PARKER-JENNINGS.*]

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Well?

PARKER-JENNINGS: [*Apologetically.*] My dear.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: [*Indignantly.*] You've been and
gone and made another old fool of yourself, Jennings.

PARKER-JENNINGS: [*With a deprecating laugh.*] I'm afraid it's
the same old fool as usual, Maria.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Don't make jokes at me, Robert.
Keep them for your City friends.

PARKER-JENNINGS: He's had breakfast.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: 'As he indeed. At 'alf-past eleven.
He's not putting himself out, is he?

VINCENT: When's he going, father?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: It isn't a question of when he's going. Your father went to him and said he was to clear out before twelve o'clock or we'd send for the police, come what might. That's what you told him, Robert isn't it?

PARKER-JENNINGS: Well, my dear . . .

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: You always were a fool, Jennings.
What have you done now?

PARKER-JENNINGS: Well, my dear, he insisted on having one of the footmen in the room. He said he didn't like this English habit of ours of having no servants at the breakfast-table.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: You don't mean to say you let him order my servants about?

PARKER-JENNINGS: My dear, what could I do? There was one of them in the room at the time.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: And you sat by while he ate his breakfast?

PARKER-JENNINGS: He has a very healthy appetite, Maria.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Don't talk to me. You must 'ave 'ad some opportunity to give him a piece of your mind.

PARKER-JENNINGS: Well, my dear, we were left alone for a minute.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Well?

PARKER-JENNINGS: [*Helplessly.*] He was so affable that . . .

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Affable! Oh, you blithering fool.
Wait till I get a word with him.

PARKER-JENNINGS: Well, my dear, why didn't you get rid of him last night?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: How could I get rid' of 'im last night, with eighteen people come to dinner to meet 'im?

VINCENT: What about Lady Wanley?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, I never want to set eyes on her again. I know she was at the bottom of this.

VINCENT: But I thought you'd sent for her.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: So I 'ave, and for Holland too. They got us into the mess, and they must get us out of it. It's just as bad for them as for us now. That's one comfort.

[JACK STRAW comes in, in flannels, looking very cool and comfortable.

JACK STRAW: Hulloo, there you are! I was just hunting around for some one to give me a cigarette.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: [*Ironically.*] I 'ope you 'ad a comfortable breakfast.

JACK STRAW: A r, thanks. Give me a cigarette, old man?

[VINCENT is helping himself to one, and JACK STRAW takes the case out of his hand, helps himself, and returns it.

VINCENT: Don't mind me, will you?

JACK STRAW: Not at all.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: [*Aggressively.*] Well?

JACK STRAW: Jolly party you gave yesterday, Mrs. Jennings. It was a great success, wasn't it? [*Turning to PARKER-JENNINGS.*] By the way, what was that port we drank last night?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: No, you don't, my friend. You may be able to bluff Jennings, but you don't bluff me.

JACK STRAW: Bluff? Bluff? I flatter myself on my knowledge of English, but I don't think I've ever come across that word.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Haven't you? Perhaps you 'aven't come across the word skilly either? But, unless you look out, you'll know what it is before you want to.

JACK STRAW: You talk in riddles, dear lady. I always think it a fatiguing habit.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, I'll make myself clear. Don't you 'ave any fear about that.

JACK STRAW: [*Sitting down lazily.*] I can't help feeling the interval between breakfast and luncheon in a country house is one of the most agreeable moments of the day.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: See that there's no one about, Vincent.

VINCENT: It's all right, mater.

JACK STRAW: [*Looking at him blandly.*] You have all the airs of a conspirator in a romantic play, my friend. You only want a false beard and some blue spectacles to make the picture perfect.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Now then, you listen to me, young man.

JACK STRAW: You flatter me, madam.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: We've talked it over, my 'usband and me, and we're no fools, whatever you may think. You richly deserve to be 'anded over to the police.

JACK STRAW: One moment. To which character are you now addressing yourself, to the Archduke Sebastian or the waiter from the Grand Babylon Hotel?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, if you don't take care, I'll give you such a box on the ears.

JACK STRAW: You certainly wouldn't do that to a royal personage, would you? You must be concerned for the moment with Jack Straw.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: It may surprise you, but I 'ave been for the last 'alf hour.

JACK STRAW: I thought your manner had been a little abrupt.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: I was saying that you richly deserved to be 'anded over to the police.

JACK STRAW: There may be two opinions on that question, but we will let it pass.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: But we don't want a scandal.

JACK STRAW: One has to be so careful in the smart set, doesn't one?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: And we're willing to let you go. Your luggage shall be packed, the motor shall take you to the station.

VINCENT: Mother, we shall all have to see him off, or it'll look so fishy.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, we'll see him off. Anything to get rid of 'im safely. There's a train in an hour from now. And I 'ave only one piece of advice to you, and that is, take the chance while you've got it.

JACK STRAW: It's very kind of you, but I'm extremely comfortable here.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: You make me laugh.

JACK STRAW: I always think it hard that it should be so difficult to make people do that when you're trying to be funny, and so easy when you're trying to be serious.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: You don't want me to tell my footman to take you by the scruff of the neck, and . . .

JACK STRAW: My dear lady, let us keep perfectly calm. It would become neither of us to lose our tempers.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Do you mean to say you won't go?

JACK STRAW: You put it in such a brutal way. Let us say rather, that I cannot tear myself away from your hospitable roof.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Ha, and how long do you propose to give us the honour of your company?

JACK STRAW: Well, I really haven't quite made up my mind. I'm proposing to await developments.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Send for the police, Robert. I won't put up with it.

VINCENT: You know, mother . . .

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Hold your tongue, Vincent . . .

[To JACK STRAW.] Oh, my friend, I'm sorry for you. Those nice white 'ands of yours will look pretty after they've been picking oakum for six months.

JACK STRAW: I had an idea that had been abolished in England.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh no, I think not.

JACK STRAW: Ah, perhaps it was the treadmill I was thinking of.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Well, Vincent, 'ow much longer are you going to stand there like a stuffed owl?

JACK STRAW: Do my eyes deceive me, or is that a local paper that I see? [*He takes it up.*] Ah, I surmised that it would have an account of your garden party. Two columns of it, by Jovel! You must wish you hadn't asked so many people. [*Reading.*] 'The Duchess of St. Erth, the Marchioness of Mereston, the Marquess of Mereston, Lord and Lady Hollington, Viscount Parnaby—dear me, how smart—Lady Wanley, Mr. and Mrs. Lamberville, the Bishop of Sheffield, and the Honourable Mrs. Spratte. . . . I say, won't your humbler friends grind their teeth with envy. But doesn't it say anything about me? Here it is. [*Reading.*] "The Archduke Sebastian looked every inch a prince." I said so. [*Reading to himself.*] Oh, spare my blushes. [*Aloud.*] "His Royal Highness enchanted every one by the grace of his bearing and the charm of his Imperial personality." Blood will tell.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: [*To PARKER-JENNINGS.*] Are you going to stand there and let this man insult me, Robert?

JACK STRAW: [*Blandly.*] And what do you imagine all these noble and distinguished persons will think when they read in the next number of the local paper that the royal personage whose hand they were so pleased to shake—I did my duty like a hero, didn't I?—was serving coffee and liqueurs a fortnight ago in the Grand Babylon Hotel?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, be quiet, you . . .

JACK STRAW: I can hear a titter rising softly in the village, with the doctor and the parson and the solicitor, whom you didn't ask to your party, and I can hear it increase to a ripple of laughter as the story spreads through Cheshire. I can hear a Homeric peal as it travels from county to county. It's a great guffaw in Manchester and Liverpool and the cities of the North, and already I hear the deep laughter of Bristol and Portsmouth and the West. And when it reaches London—you know how things go in London, it's so large that it takes it a little time really to get hold of anything, but when at last it comes, can't you see the huge city holding its aching sides and bellowing with laughter. But I'll tell you who won't see the joke—*[taking up the paper and reading]*—oh, they'll laugh very much on the wrong side of their mouths; the Duchess of St. Erth, the Marchioness of Mereston, and my Lady Hollington and my Lord Parnaby, and the Bishop of Sheffield and the Honourable Mrs. Spratte.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, you devil

JACK STRAW: I can see you flying before the laughter like three tremulous leaves before the wind, and the laughter will pursue you to Paris, where they'll make little songs about you on the boulevards, and the Riviera, where they'll sell your photographs on picture post-cards. I can see you fleeing across the Atlantic to hide your heads in the immensity of America, and there the Yellow Press, pea-green with frenzy, will pile column of ridicule upon column of invective. Oh, my dear lady, do you think it

isn't worth while to endure six months hard labour to amuse the world so profoundly?

[There is a silence. PARKER-JENNINGS takes out his handkerchief, makes it into a ball and mops his forehead. VINCENT noticing him, does the same. MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS gives the two a glance, sees what they are doing, takes out her handkerchief, rolls it up, and slowly mops her forehead.]

PARKER-JENNINGS: It's no good, Maria; we can't give him in charge.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Tell me something I don't know. We're in the man's hands, and he knows it.

JACK STRAW: *[With an amiable smile.]* I thought you would come to see the situation from my point of view.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: *[Beaten.]* What are you going to do?

JACK STRAW: At the present moment, with your permission, I am going to have a small brandy and soda. Ring the bell, Vincent.

VINCENT: Shall I, ma?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: *[With angry resignation.]* Oh, yes, ring it.

JACK STRAW: For your own sake, I warn you to behave with the utmost decorum before the servant.

[A FOOTMAN appears.]

PARKER-JENNINGS: Bring his Royal Highness a brandy and soda, James.

SERVANT: Very good, sir. *[Exit.]*

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, I wish it would choke you.

JACK STRAW: I'm afraid I can hold out no hope of that.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Now, look here, I'm no fool, Mr. —I don't know what to call you . . .

JACK STRAW: You'll find it'll be more convenient to address me as you have always done.

VINCENT: The cheek of it! I can see myself saying sir to a damned waiter.

JACK STRAW: You were assuring me that you were no fool, madam.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: You know just as we do that the last thing we want is a scandal, and you've got us on toast.

JACK STRAW: Well browned on both sides.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: If you'll go quietly and at once we'll give you a couple of hundred pounds. There!

JACK STRAW: Oh, this is a blow. To think that any one should be willing to give two hundred pounds to get rid of me! And I've always flattered myself that I was such an agreeable guest in a country house.

VINCENT: They have funny tastes in the servants' hall, I daresay.

JACK STRAW: You have quite a knack of saying clever things, haven't you?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Well?

JACK STRAW: Madam, nothing will induce me to leave you till I have eradicated the unfortunate impression which I appear to have made on you.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Do you mean to say . . .

PARKER-JENNINGS: [*Interrupting.*] Take care, mother. There's James.

[*The FOOTMAN enters with brandy and soda and glasses.*]

JACK STRAW: Be a good fellow, Vincent, and mix it for me, will you?

VINCENT: Certainly, sir.

JACK STRAW: Where do you get your brandy, Mr. Jennings? I like it very much.

PARKER-JENNINGS: It's very good of your Royal Highness to say so.

Exit FOOTMAN.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, it's insufferable.

[Enter the FOOTMAN to announce.]

FOOTMAN: Lady Wanley. Mr. Holland.

[They enter. Exit FOOTMAN]

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: There you are at last! This is a pretty kettle of fish.

VINCENT: Mother, for heaven's sake don't be vulgar.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, I can't be refined now. If I'm vulgar, I can't 'elp it.

HOLLAND: But what is the matter?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Good heavens, he's the matter. He won't go.

LADY WANLEY: What!

JACK STRAW: You know, it makes me feel very uncomfortable to hear you discussing me like this. Wouldn't you like me to retire?

PARKER-JENNINGS: We've threatened him with the police.

HOLLAND: Well?

PARKER-JENNINGS: He just laughs at us.

VINCENT: We've even demeaned ourselves by offering him money.

HOLLAND: Of course he doesn't want your money.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Well, 'adn't you better suggest what he does want?

HOLLAND: Look here, Jack, you've made fools of the whole lot of us. Won't you be a brick and clear out? We really are in a deuce of a scrape.

JACK STRAW: I am always touched by an appeal to my better nature, but in this case I propose to steel myself against your entreaties.

HOLLAND: Damn you!

JACK STRAW: Don't lose your temper. You'll only say something foolish, and I shall score off you.

HOLLAND: There's only one thing to do, and that is to turn you out by main force.

JACK STRAW: That, strange as it may seem to you, has already been suggested, but I have explained to dear Mrs. Jennings the inconvenience of that course.

[*Enter the FOOTMAN.*

FOOTMAN: Mrs. Withers is in her motor, madam, and wishes to know if you can see her for a moment.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, I can see nobody.

JACK STRAW: I hope you're not refusing to see her on my account, dear Mrs. Jennings.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: [*Very affably, before the servant.*] Oh no, sir.

JACK STRAW: I wonder if you'd very much mind her coming in. I thought her such a nice woman, I should like to see her again.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, of course, if your Royal Highness wishes it . . .

JACK STRAW: Thanks so much.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Show 'er in, James.

FOOTMAN: Very good, madam.

[*Exit FOOTMAN.*

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: My own 'ouse isn't my own now. I'm forced to see every one I don't want to. If there's any one I can't bear it's Fanny Withers. I only asked her yesterday because I thought she'd eat her 'cart out with jealousy. She's a snob if you like. I don't know what she wants to come here for at this hour. [*To JACK STRAW.*] Impostor! Impostor!

JACK STRAW: You know, upon my word you're all very ungrateful. I lent an *éclat* to your party which has found

lasting fame in the columns of the local paper. I chatted cordially with the Duchess of St. Erth, I allowed the Bishop of Sheffield to tell me harrowing stories about the immorality of the very best people, and when Count what's his name . . .

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Adrian von Bremer—you might trouble to remember the name of your own Ambassador.

JACK STRAW: And when Count von Bremer came on the scene, and you were all at your wits' end, I carried the whole thing off in a way which only my native modesty prevents me from describing as superb.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: How he didn't find you out I don't know. I was on pins and needles all the time he was here.

[Enter the FOOTMAN, followed by MRS. WITHERS.]

FOOTMAN: Mrs. Horton Withers. *[Exit.]*

MRS. WITHERS: Oh, my dear, I had to pop in just to tell you how beautifully everything went off yesterday.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: I'm glad our party had your approval.

JACK STRAW: How do you do, Mrs. Withers?

MRS. WITHERS: It's very good of your Royal Highness to remember me.

JACK STRAW: It's one of the specialities of my profession, you know.

MRS. WITHERS: Are you going to favour us much longer with your presence in the neighbourhood, sir?

JACK STRAW: If Mrs. Jennings will keep me I don't propose to make an immediate move.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: My house is at your disposal, sir, as long as you choose to honour it.

JACK STRAW: Mrs. Jennings is the most amiable hostess. Don't you think it would be nice if we took a turn in the

garden, Mrs. Jennings? I'm sure Lady Wanley would like you to show her your roses.

LADY WANLEY: Mrs. Jennings was good enough to show them to us yesterday.

JACK STRAW: We have it on good authority that a thing of beauty is a joy for ever. Mr. Jennings will show them to you again to-day.

PARKER-JENNINGS: I shall be very proud and 'appy to carry out your Royal Highness's wishes.

[JACK STRAW *stands at the door for* LADY WANLEY *and* PARKER-JENNINGS *to go out.*

JACK STRAW: [*To* VINCENT.] Won't you come?

VINCENT: Certainly, sir.

[*Mrs. Withers and Vincent go out.*

JACK STRAW: I will join you in one moment. By the way, where is your daughter?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: She's gone for a walk with Lord Serlo.

JACK STRAW: Be so good as to tell her the moment she comes in that I should be very grateful if I could see her.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: What about?

JACK STRAW: She'll doubtless be able to tell you that herself after our interview.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: I'm not going to do anything of the kind.

JACK STRAW: You will be so good as to do what I ask, Mrs. Jennings. [*Exit.*

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: There, you see he actually orders me about now. I'm beginning to think we shall never get rid of him. I feel that he'll stay on here always. I can see him growing old under this roof, eating my food and drinking my wine, and sending in his tailor's bills for Jennings to pay. And it's all your doing.

HOLLAND: I'm very sorry. I promise you that.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: What's the good of being sorry?
The only thing you can do is to 'elp us to get rid of 'im.
And it's ruined Ethel's chances with Serlo. He won't
look at her now.

HOLLAND: Well, I daresay that's not much loss.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: I'm only thankful she wouldn't 'ave
anything to do with that man when we thought 'e was an
Archduke.

HOLLAND: Do you know, if I were you I'd let her see him. I
have an idea that when he's had a talk with her he'll be
quite willing to go.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: What do you mean by that?

[Enter ETHEL and LORD SERLO.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: [*Very affably.*] Has Ethel been
taking you for a walk, dear Lord Serlo.

SERLO: Yes, we've been for a little stroll, don't you know.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: I do 'opc she 'asn't tired you.
She's such a walker, ain't you, my dear?

SERLO: My idea of goin' for a walk is sitting on a gate, don't
you know.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: And a very good idea too. That's
just what I like myself.

SERLO: [*Drily.*] Change in the wind to-day, isn't there?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: [*Innocently.*] Is there? I didn't
notice it.

[PARKER-JENNINGS comes in frantically.

PARKER-JENNINGS: Maria, he's cutting all our prize roses for
the show and giving them to Fannie Withers.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh!

[*She is just going to bolt out when JACK STRAW appears
with a handful of magnificent roses.*

JACK STRAW: I say, you haven't got a basket, have you?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: You—you—you perfect fool!

JACK STRAW: What have I done now?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: We were going to show those next week at the Crystal Palace.

JACK STRAW: I thought they were very nice. That's why it struck me Mrs. Withers might like them.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: [*Snatching them from him.*] Oh!

[*She flounces out, followed by PARKER-JENNINGS.*]

JACK STRAW: [*Coming into the room calmly.*] I'm afraid I haven't done the right thing.

SERLO: You've put your foot right in it this time, old man.

JACK STRAW: I wish I had that little book of etiquette on me. I wonder if it says anything about prize roses. [*To ETHEL.*] I haven't had the pleasure of saying good morning to you yet.

SERLO: You know, old man, I don't want to seem disagreeable, but when Miss Jennings and I went for a walk we had some sort of idea that by the time we came back you'd have hooked it, don't you know.

JACK STRAW: My dear Holland, I wonder if you'd do me the service of telling Mrs. Withers that dear Mrs. Jennings is putting the roses into a basket for her.

HOLLAND: [*Laughing against his will.*] It's not the least use being angry with you, Jack. I'll go by all means.

[*Exit.*]

JACK STRAW: There goes a man of tact. If I were a Sultan I'd make him my Grand Vizier.

[*He looks reflectively, but very pointedly, at SERLO.*]

SERLO: What are you starin' at me for?

JACK STRAW: I was wondering how I could suggest to you with proper delicacy that you might conveniently follow his example.

ETHEL: I should much prefer Lord Serlo to stay here.

JACK STRAW: I have matters of some importance to discuss with you.

ETHEL: I am sure that you have nothing to say that Lord Serlo cannot hear.

JACK STRAW: Very well, I will make an effort to overcome my customary modesty.

SERLO: I don't know where that comes in. You've got about the biggest check that I've ever come across.

JACK STRAW: To tell you the truth, it has been my only means of livelihood for the last four years.

ETHEL: What have you to say to me?

JACK STRAW: Couldn't you give me a slight smile just to encourage me a little?

ETHEL: You force me to say what I would rather have left unsaid. I'm horrified that you should be so hatefully cruel. I think it's infamous that you should lend yourself to a stupid practical joke.

JACK STRAW: My dear Serlo, won't you—hook it?

ETHEL: I want him to stay.

JACK STRAW: It makes him feel very uncomfortable. He's full of tact too—I'll make him a grand vizier—and he's feeling awfully *de trop*.

SERLO: You needn't bother about my feelings so much as all that, you know.

JACK STRAW: [To ETHEL.] Won't you hear what I've got to say for myself? You don't think I care twopence about their practical joke? I came here because it was my only chance of seeing you.

ETHEL: What you've done fills me with horror and disgust.

JACK STRAW: Didn't you see from the first minute that I was desperately in love with you?

SERLO: I say, this really is very awkward for me.

JACK STRAW: You told me not to bother about your feelings.

ETHEL: [*Unable to prevent a laugh.*] You know, you're too absurd. I know I ought to be very angry with you, but I can't.

JACK STRAW: Do you remember what you said to me yesterday?

ETHEL: No.

JACK STRAW: Then I'll remind you. You asked me to go away—because I was a royal personage. Do you still want me to go if I'm only a waiter?

ETHEL: I might have known that you were laughing at me all the time.

JACK STRAW: You know, if I had been a royal personage and disguised myself as a waiter in order to be by your side you'd have thought it very romantic. Why should it shock you when it is a waiter who for the same reason assumes the royal personage?

ETHEL: If you can't see the difference it's useless for me to tell you.

JACK STRAW: Won't you marry me, Ethel?

SERLO: I say, I've got a good mind to kick you out of the house.

JACK STRAW: Have you? In that case I can only congratulate myself that I'm the champion amateur boxer in Pomerania.

SERLO: That complicates matters a bit, don't it?

JACK STRAW: Upon my soul, I've never made a proposal of marriage under such embarrassing circumstances. [*To* ETHEL.] Now, my dear, don't be unreasonable. You practically refused me yesterday because I was an Archduke. You're not going to refuse me now because I'm nobody in particular?

ETHEL: [*Frigidly.*] And can you give me any reason why I should accept you?

JACK STRAW: Well, it may have escaped your notice, but there's the very good reason that you're just as much in love with me as I am with you.

ETHEL: IP

JACK STRAW: Can you honestly deny it? But if you do I shall venture to disbelieve you.

ETHEL: It's very easy to convince you. Lord Serlo, you were good enough to tell me yesterday that . . .

[She stops with a little tremor of hesitation.]

SERLO: By Jove, d'you mean it?

ETHEL: *[Smiling.]* I mean anything you like.

SERLO: *[With a low bow.]* Mr. Straw, I beg to announce to you my engagement with Miss Ethel Parker-Jennings.

JACK STRAW: I'm still unconvinced. I'm afraid you're incorrigibly romantic, my dear, and I'm certain your mamma will be very much annoyed.

ETHEL: Oh, you are too exasperating. I wish I could make you really angry.

[HOLLAND runs in.]

HOLLAND: I say, Jack, look out.

JACK STRAW: What's the matter?

[Enter Mrs. PARKER-JENNINGS, much agitated, and PARKER-JENNINGS.]

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: The game's up. It's too late now to do anything.

HOLLAND: Von Bremer has come again.

PARKER-JENNINGS: And he's got some one with him in his motor, who looks suspiciously like a policeman in plain clothes.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: What's to be done? For 'eaven's sake, don't stand there grinning like a Cheshire cat.

ETHEL: *[Quickly.]* You won't be arrested?

HOLLAND: Look here, there's still time for you to get out.

[Enter VINCENT.]

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Well?

VINCENT: Lady Wanley's talking to him. She'll detain him as long as she can.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Blessings on her! I'll forgive 'er everything.

ETHEL: Oh, please go while you have a chance. I couldn't bear to see you arrested.

JACK STRAW: Why should you care?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Now, look here. You've played a nasty trick on me, but you've got the cheek of the devil. I don't want you to get into trouble. I don't know what there is about you, but I can't 'elp liking you.

JACK STRAW: Madam, only the importunate presence of your lord and master prevents me from hurling myself at your feet.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, don't talk stuff. I want to 'elp you to get away.

JACK STRAW: [*With a dramatic gesture.*] Madam, my mother's only son has never fled before a foe. I will stay and face the music.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: I'm not thinking of myself now. If there is a scandal I'm rich enough to make people forget it.

SERLO: I say, old man, you'd better hook it. England's no place for you just now.

ETHEL: [*In an undertone.*] If you care for me at all, don't run this horrible risk.

JACK STRAW: If you were only pressing me to stay this unanimity would be extremely flattering.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: The man's mad. The man's as mad as a March 'are. He ought to be shut up in a lunatic asylum.

JACK STRAW: I forget if Napoleon was one of my ancestors, but I feel just like him at this moment. "J'y suis, j'y reste."

SERLO: In point of fact it was MacMahon who said that.

JACK STRAW: [*With a noble flourish.*] I prefer to think it was Napoleon.

PARKER-JENNINGS: They're just strolling along.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Then it's too late. And it's all got to come out before Florrie Withers.

VINCENT: [*From the window.*] I say, Lady Wanley is making him look at the roses.

HOLLAND: She is a brick; she's gaining every moment she can.

JACK STRAW: By the way, talking about roses, have you had that bunch put in a basket that I cut for Mrs. Withers?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, I should like to take you by the neck and strangle you.

PARKER-JENNINGS: Look out.

[*They all stop for a moment in a state of breathless expectation. LADY WANLEY comes in with Mrs. Withers. She gasps as she sees JACK STRAW.*]

LADY WANLEY: Oh, I thought you'd gone.

[*She is immediately followed by ADRIAN VON BREMER. JACK STRAW goes up to him very cordially.*]

JACK STRAW: Ah, my dear friend, I've been expecting you all the morning.

[*They all start. As the scene proceeds there is in every one increasing astonishment and perplexity.*]

VON BREMER: I couldn't come before. I have only just received the answer to my telegram.

JACK STRAW: Have you good news for me?

VON BREMER: The best. The Emperor agrees to all your wishes.

JACK STRAW: Bless his old heart.

VON BREMER: His Majesty is all eagerness to see you again. He is expecting a letter from you by every post. [*He goes up to ETHEL.*] Madam, I am commanded by my august master to offer you his most cordial greeting.

ETHEL: Me?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: I don't know if I'm standing on my 'ead or my 'eels.

JACK STRAW: Then nothing remains but for me to make my declaration in due form. Mrs. Jennings, I have my grandfather's permission to ask you for your daughter's hand in marriage.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: [*Breaking out.*] But the man's an impostor. He's no more the Archduke Sebastian than I am.

MRS. WITHERS: What do you mean?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Oh, well, if you like you can 'ave it. You were there when it all started. I suppose I got out the wrong side of bed that morning, and when Mrs. Thing-a-magig, the Vicar's wife, come up to me at the Grand Babylon Hotel, I snubbed her. I've been very sorry for it since, and I've been punished for it. They knew I was an old snob—like you, Florrie—they thought they'd pay me out. They got one of the waiters from the 'otel to dress up like a gentleman, and they introduced him as the Archduke Sebastian.

MRS. WITHERS: [*Pointing to JACK STRAW.*] That?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Yes, that! He's a waiter, that's what he is. And for the last week I've been making a perfect fool of myself over 'im.

VON BREMER: [*Much mystified.*] But—I don't understand. I've known the Archduke Sebastian since he was born.

HOLLAND: You're mistaken. This person and I were in America together. I lived with him for two years. I

don't know his real name, but he passes under that of Jack Straw.

VON BREMER: But what you say is absurd. I know him as well as my own son.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: D'you mean to say he really is an Archduke?

VON BREMER: Of course he is. The only mystery is how he turned up here when we've been hunting the whole world for the last four years to find him.

HOLLAND: But are you the Jack Straw who was with me in the States?

JACK STRAW: Yes.

LADY WANLEY: And are you the waiter of the Grand Babylon Hotel?

JACK STRAW: Yes.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: And are you the Archduke Sebastian of Pomerania?

JACK STRAW: Yes.

SERLO: Well, I'm jiggered.

JACK STRAW: Perhaps you will allow me to explain. Four years ago I fell desperately in love with a lady whose speciality it was to kick higher than any one else in the world. She could kick a man's tall hat off his head with such grace that I asked her to marry me. My grandfather refused to consent, and the lady was hurried over the frontier. [*With a glance at ETHEL.*] I was a romantic dog myself in those days, and I followed her, only to find that she had already three more or less lawful husbands. The sight of them, and the conviction that her peculiar talent would not greatly add to the felicity of domestic life, cured me of my passion. But the world did seem a bit hollow and empty, and I thought I'd see how it looked from the point of view of a man who had nothing but his wits to live on. After trying it, I tell you frankly that I

much prefer living on the revenues which rise from the strength of arm of my ancestors. When you saw me at the Grand Babylon Hotel I was preparing to return to the bosom of my family, but I saw this young lady, and the chance offering, decided to come down here. It was not unnatural that when I was asked to assume a grandiloquent name I should assume my own. Yesterday, when I met Count von Bremer, I begged him to wire to the Emperor, asking for his consent to my marriage with Miss Ethel Jennings.

VON BREMER: I have only to add that the Emperor, delighted with the prospect of seeing once more his favourite grandson, has gladly given his consent.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: And when I think of all the things I've called you these last few hours . . .

JACK STRAW: They went in at the ear of a waiter, Madam, and slipped out at that of an Archduke.

[*He goes up to* **ETHEL**.]

JACK STRAW: And now it only rests with you to give peace to an aged Emperor, satisfaction to eighty-one Archdukes, and happiness to your unworthy servant.

ETHEL: I am engaged to be married to Lord Serlo.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: What! I know nothing about this.

JACK STRAW: I knew our mamma wouldn't be pleased.

ETHEL: The fact remains.

JACK STRAW: [*Going to* **SERLO**.] Now, my dear friend, you've got the chance of a lifetime. It's quite clear to me that there's only one course open to you. Take the centre of the stage and renounce the lady with all the moving expressions you can think of.

SERLO: Look here, old man, I don't think I quite like the way you keep on pulling my leg.

JACK STRAW: Put a little dignity into it, man.

SERLO: I may be a blithering ass, but I can see without your tellin' me that Ethel wouldn't have had me at any price if she hadn't wanted to score off you.

JACK STRAW: Oh, how some men throw away their chances! Strike the pathetic note, old man, or you're done. When you've finished there oughtn't to be a dry eye in the place.

SERLO: Well, the fact is—it had entirely slipped my memory at the moment, but I had a letter this morning from the lady's solicitor to remind me—I happen to be engaged to a young woman who can kick a man's topper off too.

JACK STRAW: By Jove, I wonder if it's the same one.

ETHEL: Why didn't you tell me?

SERLO: Well, you know, it was a bit awk when you—
er . . .

JACK STRAW: Threw yourself at his head.

ETHEL: [*To JACK STRAW with a smile.*] I ought to be very angry with you. You've laughed at me all the time. I don't believe you'll ever take me seriously. If I really were the romantic creature you say I am, I'd be very dignified and refuse to have anything to do with you at all.

JACK STRAW: But like all women you're very sensible at heart, and you'll do nothing of the kind.

ETHEL: It's not because I'm sensible, but because I suppose you were quite right in what you said just now.

JACK STRAW: Bless you! I'd throw myself down on the floor and implore you to walk on me only I'm convinced you'd take me at my word.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: [*With enormous satisfaction.*] I knew he was an Archduke all the time. You can't deceive a mother.

JACK STRAW: [*With a start.*] There's one thing I must break to you at once. Pomerania is in some ways still a

barbarous country. We have a dreadful law that when a member of the royal family marries a foreigner not of royal blood, his wife's relations are prohibited from entering it.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: I should like to see any one prohibit me from going to see my own daughter.

JACK STRAW: My dear lady, it grieves me infinitely to say it, but no sooner had you crossed our frontier than you would be instantly beheaded.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS: Truly, sir, a barbarous country.

THE END

PENELOPE

A COMEDY
in Three Acts

CHARACTERS

PENELOPE

DR. O'FARRELL

PROFESSOR GOLIGHTLY

MRS. GOLIGHTLY

MR. DAVENPORT BARLOW

MRS. FERGUSSON

MR. BEADSWORTH

MRS. WATSON

A PATIENT

PEYTON

TIME: 1908.

PENELOPE

THE FIRST ACT

SCENE: *A drawing-room in O'Farrell's house in John Street. It is very prettily but not extravagantly furnished. The O'Farrells are a young married couple of modest income. It is between six and seven in the evening.*

PEYTON, a neat parlour-maid, opens the door and shows in MR. DAVENPORT BARLOW.

BARLOW is a short, self-important person of middle age. He is very bald, red in the face, and wears a small, neatly curled moustache; he is dressed in the height of fashion. His manner is fussy and pompous. He comes forward as though he expected to find some one in the room. Seeing that it is empty, he stops and looks at PEYTON. He cannot make out why there is no one to receive him.

BARLOW: [*In a tone of surprise.*] Is Mrs. O'Farrell not here?

PEYTON: No, sir.

BARLOW: H'm. . . . Will you let her know I've come?

PEYTON: Mrs. O'Farrell is not at home, sir.

BARLOW: Not at home? . . . But . . .

PEYTON: Mrs. O'Farrell said, would you kindly sit down and make yourself comfortable? And I was to give you the *Morning Post*.

BARLOW: [*Pompously.*] I can't imagine why Mrs. O'Farrell should think I haven't read the *Morning Post* at six o'clock in the evening.

PEYTON: [*Imperturbably.*] And Mrs. O'Farrell said, will you have a whisky and soda, sir?

BARLOW: But when is Mrs. O'Farrell coming in?

PEYTON: I don't know at all, sir.

BARLOW: But she telegraphed to me this afternoon, asking me to come and see her at once.

PEYTON: Yes, sir; I took the telegram to the post office myself.

BARLOW: It seems very extraordinary that she should have gone out. The matter was of considerable importance.

PEYTON: [*Politely.*] Yes, sir.

BARLOW: Very well, I'll sit down and wait. But I can't stay long. I'm dining at . . . no matter.

PEYTON: Very good, sir.

[PEYTON goes out. BARLOW goes to a looking-glass, takes a little brush out of his pocket, and brushes his moustache. PEYTON comes in again with a small tray on which are a decanter, a syphon and a glass.]

BARLOW: Oh, thank you. Did you say you had the *Morning Post*?

PEYTON: Yes, sir. [*She hands it to him.*]

BARLOW: Ah, thank you.

[PEYTON goes out. BARLOW helps himself to a whisky and soda, turns to the fashionable intelligence in the paper, and begins to read it with a little smile of self-satisfaction.]

BARLOW: [*Half to himself.*] The Duchess of St. Erth returned to Wales yesterday. The Marchioness of Mercston has arrived at 89 Grosvenor Square. The Marchioness of Serlo and Lady Eleanor King leave for Paris this morning.

[PEYTON comes in, followed by Mrs. GOLIGHTLY. Mrs. GOLIGHTLY is an extremely stout, good-natured lady of middle age. She is very active, but short of breath. She gives one a continual impression of having just run up a steep hill. She is DAVENPORT BARLOW'S sister.]

PEYTON: Mrs. Golightly.

BARLOW: Isabell

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: Are you here, Davenport? Where's Penelope?

BARLOW: [*As if it were the most extraordinary thing in the world.*] She's out!

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: [*Astonished.*] Out?

[*She turns to PEYTON with a look of inquiry*]

PEYTON: Mrs. O'Farrell said, would you kindly sit down and make yourself comfortable, ma'am? And I was to bring you the *Church Times*.

BARLOW: But . . .

PEYTON: [*Calmly.*] And Mrs. O'Farrell said, will you have a strong cup of tea, ma'am?

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: I'm surprised that Mrs. O'Farrell should have gone out, because she expected me.

PEYTON: [*Handing MRS. GOLIGHTLY a paper.*] Yes, ma'am.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: [*Taking it.*] What is this?

PEYTON: The *Church Times*, ma'am.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: [*With a look of exasperation at BARLOW.*] Oh, thank you. . . . I think I will have a cup of tea, please.

PEYTON: Very good, ma'am. [*Exit.*]

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: I wonder why on earth Penelope should insist on my reading the *Church Times*.

BARLOW: I've just had a telegram from her.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: So have I, asking me to come at once. [*With a ray of light.*] Perhaps we shall find some explanation in the *Church Times*.

BARLOW: Nonsense. What can the *Church Times* have to do with the Archduchess Anastasia?

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: My dear Davenport, what are you talking about?

[PEYTON enters to announce PROFESSOR GOLIGHTLY and immediately afterwards goes out. GOLIGHTLY is a tall, spare man with grey hair, well groomed and alert. He is neatly dressed, quite tidy, and might just as well be a lawyer or a doctor as a professor of mathematics. He is clean-shaven.]

PEYTON: Professor Golightly.

GOLIGHTLY: Hulloo, Davenport! [To his wife.] My dear, you're the last person I expected to find here. I thought there was a meeting of the Missionary Society at the Albert Hall.

[PEYTON comes in with a tray on which are tea-things, a glass of barley-water, and a copy of the *Athenæum*.]

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: Oh, thank you.

PEYTON: [To GOLIGHTLY.] Mrs. O'Farrell said, will you have a glass of barley-water, sir?

GOLIGHTLY: Barley-water!

PEYTON: And I was to bring you the *Athenæum*. We couldn't get this week's, sir, but this is last week's, and Mrs. O'Farrell hopes it will do as well.

GOLIGHTLY: [With a faint smile.] It's very kind of you to have taken so much trouble.

PEYTON: Thank you, sir. [Exit.]

GOLIGHTLY: What on earth does Penelope want me to do with last week's *Athenæum* and a glass of barley-water?

BARLOW: Well, presumably she wants you to drink the one and to read the other.

GOLIGHTLY: [To his wife.] My dear, I think it's very hard that you should have brought up our only child on the idea that my favourite form of refreshment is barley-water.

BARLOW: It looks as if Penelope expected you, too.

GOLIGHTLY: I've just had a wire from her.

BARLOW: Have you? I wonder why on earth she wired to you.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: It's so extraordinary that she shouldn't be here. It makes me feel very nervous.

GOLIGHTLY: Well, frankly, I couldn't make head or tail of it, so I jumped into a motor cab and came round from the club at once.

[PEYTON comes in, followed by BEADSWORTH. He is a middle-aged solicitor, with a benign manner.]

PEYTON: Mr. Beadsworth.

GOLIGHTLY: Well, I'm hanged.

BARLOW: My dear Charles, I wish you wouldn't be slangy. It's gone out in our set.

BEADSWORTH: [*Shaking hands with* MRS. GOLIGHTLY.] I've just had a telegram from Penelope asking me to come at once. [*Turning to* PEYTON.] Will you let Mrs. O'Farrell know I'm here?

GOLIGHTLY: She's out.

PEYTON: Mrs. O'Farrell said, would you make yourself comfortable, sir, and we've got the *Law Times* if you'd like to read it, and will you have a glass of port, sir?

[BEADSWORTH looks round at the others in bewilderment.]

GOLIGHTLY: By all means have a glass of port, and I'll swap it for my barley-water.

BEADSWORTH: [*To* PEYTON.] Thank you.

PEYTON: [*Handing him the paper.*] Very good, sir. [*Exit.*]

BEADSWORTH: What does she want me to do with the *Law Times*?

GOLIGHTLY: I asked the same question when Peyton handed me last week's *Athenaum*, and Davenport, with the perspicacity that distinguishes him, answered: read it.

BEADSWORTH: Can you tell me what Penelope wants? Her telegram suggested that she wished to see me not as an old friend, but in my official capacity as the family solicitor.

GOLIGHTLY: I haven't an idea. I thought her telegram most mysterious.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: I wish she'd come in. I'm beginning to be dreadfully uneasy.

BARLOW: [*Rather pompously.*] I think I can put your minds at rest. I am in a position to explain the whole matter to you. The telegram she sent me makes it perfectly clear. I daresay you know that the Archduchess Anastasia is a patient of Dickie's. And a very nice patient for him to have. I've never met her, though I happen to know several members of her family, and she's a very cultivated pleasant woman. I've always said to Dickie that that is the sort of practice he ought to get. The middle classes do a doctor no good.

GOLIGHTLY: My dear Davenport, do go on with your story.

BARLOW: Well, it appears that the Archduchess Anastasia has signified her desire to know Penelope. Very charming and graceful action on her part, and just like her. Of course she's extremely grateful to Dickie for all he's done. He's worked a miraculous cure, and I daresay she's heard that Penelope is my niece. It's a maxim you can always go on: royalty knows everything. And the long and the short of it is that she's coming to lunch here. Of course Penelope knows nothing about these matters, and in a state of great excitement she's sent for me. It's the best thing she could do. I can tell her everything. I've lived in that set all my life. It's nothing to be particularly proud about—mere accident of birth—I happen to be a gentleman. A certain family. Well, there it is, you see.

GOLIGHTLY: But do you mean to say that Penelope wired all that to you? It must have cost her a perfect fortune.

BARLOW: She put it a little more briefly, of course, but that was the gist of it.

BEADSWORTH: I can't imagine why she should send for me

because a royalty is coming to luncheon with her. It was very inconvenient to get away. I had a dozen people waiting to see me, and I was obliged to slip out by the back door in order to avoid them.

GOLIGHTLY: But what are the exact words of the wire she sent you, Davenport?

BARLOW: You can see it if you like. [*Taking it from his pocket and reading.*] "Come at once. Archduchess Anastasia. Penelope."

GOLIGHTLY: But d'you mean to say that you made up all that story out of those three words?

BARLOW: Penelope knew I had a certain amount of intelligence. She didn't want to waste her money, so she just put what was essential, and left me to gather the rest.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: But my telegram says nothing about the Archduchess Anastasia.

BARLOW: What did Penelope say to you?

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: [*Taking out the telegram.*] "Come at once! Grave scandal! Central African Mission. Penelope."

BARLOW: But that's absurd. You know how stupid the Post Office is. They must have made a mistake. I know that the Pomeranian Royal Family is very odd, but there *are* limits, and I can't imagine the Archduchess Anastasia being mixed up in a scandal with a Central African missionary.

BEADSWORTH: Well, my wire merely said: "Come at once; six and eightpence. Penelope."

BARLOW: Six and eightpence! Why six and eightpence?

BEADSWORTH: I don't know. That is why I lost no time in coming.

GOLIGHTLY: [*With a twinkle.*] My impression is that the Archduchess Anastasia, instead of paying Dickie's bill for miraculously curing her, has eloped with a missionary, and Penelope, by aid of the law [*with a gesture towards*

BEADSWORTH], wants to recover the money.

BARLOW: It's nonsense! You're so unpractical, Charles.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: [*To her husband.*] But you had a telegram too, dear.

GOLIGHTLY: "Come at once. Decimal 7035. Penelope."

BARLOW: How very odd.

[*The door is softly opened and PENELOPE slips in; for a moment the others do not see her, and she stands smiling at them. GOLIGHTLY catches sight of her. All the others turn.*]

GOLIGHTLY: Penelope.

THE OTHERS: Penelope.

PENELOPE: [*Coming forward and kissing MRS. GOLIGHTLY.*] Good evening, mammal

BARLOW: [*Eagerly.*] Well?

PENELOPE: Well, papa. [*She puts her face up for him to kiss.*]

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: [*Anxiously.*] Now, Penelope.

PENELOPE: Oh, Mr. Beadsworth, how nice of you to come.
[*She shakes hands with him.*] Kiss me, Uncle Davenport.
[*She calmly puts up her face. With some irritation he kisses her.*]

PENELOPE: Thank you. . . . Was your whisky and soda quite right? [*Looking round.*] And the port? Father, you haven't touched the barley-water. You ungrateful old thing!

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: [*Exasperated.*] My dear, for goodness' sake explain.

BARLOW: Where have you been all this time?

PENELOPE: I—I've been sitting in the consulting-room.
[*With a roguish smile.*] I watched you all come in.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: [*Rather injured.*] Peyton said you were out.

BARLOW: Really, Penelope, I think your behaviour is outrageous.

PENELOPE: You see, I thought if I saw you one after the other as you came in, I should have to make four scenes instead of one. It would have been very exhausting and not nearly so effective.

GOLIGHTLY: Are you going to make a scene?

PENELOPE: [*With the greatest satisfaction.*] I'm going to make a dreadful scene in a minute.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: Now, my dear, before you go any further, for goodness' sake tell us what you meant by your telegrams.

PENELOPE: Well, you see, I wanted you all to come immediately, and I thought the best thing was to trail your ruling passions under your noses.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: Do you understand what she means, Charles?

PENELOPE: My dear mother, it's the simplest thing in the world. You spend your life in converting the heathen—from a distance—and I knew if I mentioned the Central African Mission you'd fly here on the wings of the wind.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: In point of fact I came in an omnibus. But do you mean to tell me that there has been no scandal in connection with the Central African Mission?

PENELOPE: [*Smiling.*] I'm dreadfully sorry to disappoint you, mother.

GOLIGHTLY: And what in heaven's name made you wire decimal 7035 to me?

PENELOPE: Oh, that's our telephone number, and I just put decimal instead of Gerrard.

GOLIGHTLY: I thought the figures were strangely familiar.

PENELOPE: And there you are, you see.

BARLOW: [*Chuckling.*] I think it's a capital idea. And she just flung the words six and eightpence at you, Beadsworth, and knew she'd fetch the lawyer.

PENELOPE: [*To BEADSWORTH.*] You're not cross with me, are you? [*He shakes his head smiling.*]

BARLOW: And now, my dear, that you've disposed of them, tell me all about the Archduchess Anastasia.

PENELOPE, [*Looking at him blankly.*] The Archduchess Anastasia? But I invented her.

BARLOW: What d'you mean, you invented her? I know her well, I've known her for years. I know her whole family.

PENELOPE: [*Rather embarrassed, but trying not to laugh.*] Well, you see—I wanted you to come, too. And . . .

BARLOW: I don't understand what you mean at all, Penelope. You mention one of my most intimate friends, and then you tell me you invented her.

PENELOPE: I'm awfully sorry. I really didn't know there was such a person, and I thought I'd made her up out of my own head. . . . [*With a chuckle.*] I think it was rather clever of me to hit upon some one you know so well.

BARLOW: I don't know why you should think the mere mention of the Archduchess's name would make me come here.

PENELOPE: Well, you see, I know that you go out a great deal, and you know such crowds of people. I felt quite sure that if there were an Archduchess Anastasia you'd know her, and [*with a wave of the hand*] well, there it is you see. [*BARLOW fumes silently, but does not answer.*]

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: Now, Penelope, tell us what you really do want.

PENELOPE: [*In matter-of-fact tones.*] I want to divorce Dickie.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: What!

GOLIGHTLY: My dear child.

BARLOW: Good gracious!

[*These three speeches are said simultaneously.*]

PENELOPE: [*Ruefully.*] I intended to make such a scene, and now you've made me blurt it all out in three words.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: But I don't understand.

PENELOPE: I'll say it again, shall I? I want to divorce Dickie.

BEADSWORTH: You don't really mean it, do you?

PENELOPE: [*Indignantly.*] Of course I mean it. I'm never going to speak to him again. That's to say, I shall have a scene with him first. I'm quite determined to have a scene with somebody.

GOLIGHTLY: And where is Dickie now?

PENELOPE: He's on his way home with the usual story. [*With a sudden break in her voice.*] Oh, if you only knew how utterly miserable I am.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: My darling, is it really serious?

PENELOPE: [*Desperately.*] Oh, what can I do to make you all understand?

GOLIGHTLY: The best way would be to begin at the beginning, and tell us all about it coherently.

BARLOW: [*Pompously.*] My dear Charles, this is not the kind of matter in which you can be of any use. You're a mathematician, and you're not expected to know anything about practical affairs.

GOLIGHTLY: [*Faintly ironic.*] I apologise profusely.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: [*To PENELOPE, to ask her to speak.*] Darling?

PENELOPE: Well, the first thing is that I simply dote upon Dickie. I've never loved any one else, and I never shall.

BEADSWORTH: That's a very satisfactory confession after four years of matrimony.

PENELOPE: Five years, three months, and two days. And every day I've loved Dickie more.

BEADSWORTH: I've never seen a more devoted couple.

PENELOPE: We've never had a quarrel. We've never even been cross with one another. It's been a honeymoon that's never come to an end.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: Well?

PENELOPE: And now I've discovered that he's been lying to me for the last month. He's been coming home dreadfully late, and when I've asked him where he's been, he's said that he had to see a patient who was very ill—such an interesting case—and it worried him so much that he was obliged to go to his club and have a rubber to settle his nerves. And the interesting case and the rubber of bridge are Ada Fergusson.

BARLOW: [*Pompously.*] But who is Ada Fergusson? I've never heard of her.

PENELOPE: Ada Fergusson's a great friend of mine. And I hate her. I always knew she was a cat. For the last four weeks Dickie's been spending every afternoon with her from four till seven.

GOLIGHTLY: [*Raising his eyebrows.*] But do you always ask your husband where he's been when he comes in?

PENELOPE: [*Impatiently.*] My dear papa, what has that got to do with it? We all know that you're an old dear, and the greatest mathematician in the world, but you know nothing about life at all.

GOLIGHTLY: I apologise again.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: Give him a sheet of paper and a pencil Penelope, and he'll amuse himself by doing sums while we talk the matter out.

PENELOPE: [*Pushing writing materials over to him.*] There you are, papa.

BEADSWORTH: But how did you find out?

PENELOPE: [*Impatiently.*] Oh, what does it matter how I found out! I've got all sorts of proofs.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: You could knock me down with a feather.

GOLIGHTLY: [*With a smile.*] My dear!

BARLOW: I am not in the least surprised.

PENELOPE: Uncle Davenport!

BARLOW: I have expected it all along. You will remember, Isabel, that I was against the marriage from the beginning. I said, one doesn't marry a doctor. One sometimes meets them in society when they've had their angles rubbed off a little and perhaps have been knighted, but one never meets their wives. We suppose they do marry, but they don't marry any one we know. I may be old-fashioned, but I stick to my opinion that there are only three possible professions for a gentleman, the law, the army, and the church.

PENELOPE: My dear Uncle Davenport, you're talking nonsense.

BARLOW: [*Huffily.*] You ask me for my opinion, and I give it you. I regret that you should think it nonsense.

BEADSWORTH: And what are you proposing to do now?

PENELOPE: [*With great determination.*] I'm never going to live with Dickie again. As soon as I've seen him I shall leave this house for ever.

BEADSWORTH: You're proposing to have a few words with him?

PENELOPE: Several. I'm going to tell him that I despise him, and that I hate him; I'm going to throw my wedding ring in his face, and then I shall sweep out of the room.

BEADSWORTH: Have you really made up your mind that you won't forgive him?

PENELOPE: Nothing would induce me ever to speak to him again if it weren't that I want to tell him exactly what I think of him.

BARLOW: Besides, you've got your family to think of. Of course you must leave him. You see, that is what I say, you're not safe with people of no birth. I look upon all this as a blessing in disguise.

BEADSWORTH: Do you wish to bring an action for judicial separation?

PENELOPE: My dear Mr. Beadsworth, what are you talking

about! I'm going to divorce him. I'm going to make an awful scandal.

BEADSWORTH: Well, I suppose we could arrange that at a pinch with the help of the newspapers. Has he ever been cruel to you?

PENELOPE: Good heavens, no! That's what makes me so angry. The last month he's been more perfectly charming and delightful than ever. Oh, I wish I could do something really unpleasant to Ada Fergusson. Something with boiling oil in it.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: I am shocked, frankly shocked. I would never have thought that Dickie could be so wicked.

BARLOW: Family life in England is going to the dogs. That is the long and short of it.

[Suddenly PENELOPE catches sight of what GOLIGHTLY has been diligently writing. She gives the paper a startled look and then turns round.]

PENELOPE: Mother, a dreadful thing has happened. Papa has suddenly become a drivelling lunatic.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: My dear, what are you saying?

PENELOPE: He's been adding two and two together all over that piece of paper, and he makes it five every time.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: Charles!

[PENELOPE hands the sheet to BARLOW.]

PENELOPE: Look.

BARLOW: Two and two are five. Two and two are five.

[He passes it on to BEADSWORTH.]

BEADSWORTH: Two and two are five. Two and two are five.

BARLOW: I knew this would happen. I've been expecting it for years.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: Charles, pull yourself together.

PENELOPE: Papa, you don't really think that two and two are five?

GOLIGHTLY: On the contrary, I'm convinced that two and two are four.

PENELOPE: Then why on earth have you made it five?

GOLIGHTLY: Do you know why you buy Pears' soap?

PENELOPE: I expect you've been working too hard, father dear. Why don't you go and lie down for half an hour? And when Dickie comes in he'll give you a tonic.

GOLIGHTLY: You buy Pears' soap because you're told on fifty thousand hoardings that it's matchless for the complexion.

PENELOPE: That's not funny, papa, that's silly.

GOLIGHTLY: You've only got to say a thing often enough, and all the world will believe it. And when the world believes it, it's very hard to say if it's true or not.

PENELOPE: What has that got to do with two and two?

GOLIGHTLY: I thought if I wrote two and two are five often enough I might come to think it true.

PENELOPE: But if you wrote it a million times it wouldn't be any truer.

GOLIGHTLY: That is the conclusion I'm regretfully forced to.

PENELOPE: Well?

GOLIGHTLY: The whole of life is merely a matter of adding two and two together and getting the right answer.

BARLOW: My dear Charles, if you're going to discuss life I think there's no need for me to stay. I've told you for twenty years that you're a scholar and a recluse. I have lived in the world, and I'm a practical man. If Penelope wants to consult me, I am at her service; if not . . .

PENELOPE: Hold your tongue, Uncle Davenport.

BARLOW: Really, Penelope.

GOLIGHTLY: During the last five years I've seen you adding two and two together and making them about seventy-nine.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: I don't know what you're talking about, Charles. Dickie's behaviour is abominable, and there are no excuses for him. It's a mere matter of common morality.

GOLIGHTLY: My dear, I have no objection to you talking common morality if you'll let me talk common sense.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: My dear Charles, they're the same thing.

PENELOPE: If you think you can make me forgive Dickie by telling me that you were a wicked old thing yourself in your youth, I may as well tell you at once that it won't wash.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: [*Outraged.*] What are you talking about, my dear?

PENELOPE: Well, I've noticed that when a woman discovers that her husband has been unfaithful, her male relations invariably try to console her by telling her how shockingly they've treated their own wives.

GOLIGHTLY: My dear, I was going to confess nothing of the sort. I never confess.

PENELOPE: Of course, if it were the other way about, and mamma had kicked over the traces a little . . .

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: Darling, can you see me performing an acrobatic feat of that character?

PENELOPE: Go on, papa.

GOLIGHTLY: I think you've treated Dickie shamefully.

PENELOPE: [*Astounded.*] I?

GOLIGHTLY: If your mother had behaved to me as you've behaved to Dickie, I should certainly have taken to drink.

PENELOPE: But I've been a perfect angel. I've simply worshipped the ground he walked on. I've loved him as no man was ever loved before.

GOLIGHTLY: No man could stand it.

PENELOPE: Papa, what do you mean?

GOLIGHTLY: My dear, you've loved him morning, noon and night. You've loved him when he talked, and you've loved him when he was silent. You've loved him walking, you've loved him eating, you've loved him sleeping. He's never been able to escape from your love.

PENELOPE: But I couldn't help it.

GOLIGHTLY: You need not have shown it.

PENELOPE: And do you mean to say that justifies him in philandering with Ada Fergusson?

GOLIGHTLY: It excuses him.

PENELOPE: What beasts men must be!

GOLIGHTLY: No; but strange as it may seem to you, they're human beings. When you were a child you doted on strawberry ices.

PENELOPE: I dote on them still.

GOLIGHTLY: Would you like to eat strawberry ice for breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner every day for a month?

PENELOPE: Good heavens, the thought fills me with horror.

GOLIGHTLY: Poor Dickie has lived on strawberry ice for five years. It's been his only means of sustenance.

PENELOPE: [*With consternation.*] Oh!

GOLIGHTLY: You've never let him go out without coming into the hall to put on his hat and kiss him good-bye; he's never come into the house without your running down to help him off with his coat and kiss him welcome. When he sat down after breakfast in the morning to read his paper and smoke his pipe, I've seen you sit down on the arm of his chair and put your arm round his neck.

BARLOW: [*Outraged.*] Penelope!

PENELOPE: Do you think it was very awful?

BARLOW: My dear child!

PENELOPE: [*To BEADSWORTH.*] Did Mrs. Beadsworth never sit

on the arm of your chair when you were smoking your pipe?

BEADSWORTH: I must confess I'm thankful my wife occupied those moments in attending to her household duties.

PENELOPE: You are a lot of horrid old things. I ask you to come here to sympathise with me, and you're perfectly brutal to me.

BARLOW: My dear Penelope, there are limits.

PENELOPE: Well, I don't care; I'm going to divorce him.

GOLIGHTLY: Let's do another little simple addition, shall we? Perhaps two and two will make four a second time.

PENELOPE: I don't know that I much like being a mathematician's daughter.

GOLIGHTLY: Don't you think, instead of divorcing your husband, it would be better to win back his affection?

PENELOPE: I don't want his affection.

GOLIGHTLY: [*Smiling.*] Are you sure you wouldn't if you could get it?

[*PENELOPE looks at her father for a moment, then goes up to him quickly.*]

PENELOPE: [*With tears in her voice.*] Papa, d'you think I ever could win back his love? You say I've lost it through my own fault. Oh, I don't know what to do without him. I've been so wretched since I knew. I've tried to put a cheerful face on it, but if you knew what I feel in my heart. . . . Oh, the brutes, why didn't they hide it from me?

BARLOW: My dear Penelope, I expected you to have more spirit. He's a person of no family. I should have thought you were well rid of him.

PENELOPE: Uncle Davenport, if you say a word against him, I will immediately have an attack of hysterics.

BARLOW: What you expect your father to be able to tell you I can't imagine.

GOLIGHTLY: [*Smiling.*] Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, Davenport . . .

BARLOW: I shouldn't have thought one could describe you as either. But, in any case, I can stay no longer.

PENELOPE: Oh, no, don't go yet, Uncle Davenport.

BARLOW: It appears that my advice is not wanted, and I promised to look in on dear Lady Hollington before dinner.

PENELOPE: Do telephone to her that you can't come. You'll find a telephone in my sitting-room.

BARLOW: [*Shrugging his shoulders.*] I'm too indulgent. People don't rate me at my proper value. [*He goes out.*]

PENELOPE: Papa, say you'll get Dickie back for me. I want him. I want him.

GOLIGHTLY: My dear, it's very simple. It merely requires a great deal of tact, a great deal of courage, and a great deal of self-control.

PENELOPE: [*Ironically.*] Nothing else?

GOLIGHTLY: A good deal. You must never let yourself out of hand; you must keep guard on your tongue and your eyes and your smiles—and your temper.

PENELOPE: I think you said it was very simple.

GOLIGHTLY: Is Ada Fergusson pretty?

PENELOPE: No, she's perfectly hideous.

GOLIGHTLY: Is she? That makes it more serious.

PENELOPE: Why?

GOLIGHTLY: If a man falls in love with a pretty woman, he falls out of it. But if he falls in love with a plain one, he'll be in love with her all his life.

PENELOPE: You take a load off my mind. Ada Fergusson's extremely attractive.

GOLIGHTLY: Then you'll get him back.

PENELOPE: Tell me exactly what to do, and I'll do it.

GOLIGHTLY: Give him his head.

PENELOPE: Is that all?

GOLIGHTLY: It means a good deal. When he comes in, don't make a scene, but be charming to him. For once, don't ask him where he's been. When he leaves you, don't ask him where he's going, nor at what time he'll be back. Don't let him know that you have the least suspicion that anything has happened. On the contrary, take every opportunity of throwing him into Ada Fergusson's society.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: Charles, you're asking Penelope to connive at immorality.

GOLIGHTLY: When every difficulty disappears, Dickie will find half the savour of the intrigue gone. Half your battle is won. Leave the rest to time and Ada Fergusson. Let Ada Fergusson sit on the arm of his chair when he wants to read his paper. Let him account to Ada Fergusson for all his movements. Under such circumstances a woman is always on tenterhooks, and consequently she's always exacting. Whenever there's a pause in the conversation, Ada Fergusson will say, Do you care for me as much as ever you did? That speech is the rope around love's throat. Whenever he wants to go away, Ada Fergusson will implore him to stay five minutes longer. Those five minutes that a man stays against his will are the nails in love's coffin. Each time he leaves her Ada Fergusson will say, At what time will you be back? That question is the earth shovelled into love's grave.

[*All this while PENELOPE has been staring at GOLIGHTLY with astonishment.*]

PENELOPE: Where did you learn all this, father?

GOLIGHTLY: [*With a deprecating shrug.*] It's a mere matter of adding two and two together, my darling.

PENELOPE: I had no idea that mathematics were so interesting—nor so immoral.

GOLIGHTLY: What do you think of it?

PENELOPE: But if Dickie falls out of love with Ada Fergusson there's no reason why he should fall in love again with me.

GOLIGHTLY: You must make him.

PENELOPE: I wish I knew how.

GOLIGHTLY: It only requires a little more tact, a little more courage, and a little more self-control.

PENELOPE: But if I acquire so many virtues I shan't be a woman, but a monster, and how can he love me then?

BEADSWORTH: [*From the window.*] There's a car stopping at the door.

PENELOPE: Listen. . . . I can hear a key being turned. It must be Dickie.

BEADSWORTH: What are you going to do?

PENELOPE: [*Hesitating.*] What do you think, mamma?

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: My dear, I highly disapprove of your father's idea, and I can't imagine how it ever came into his head, but I'm bound to say I think there's some sense in it.

PENELOPE: [*Making up her mind.*] I'll try. Remember, no one knows anything that has happened. You'll back me up, mamma, won't you?

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: You're not going to ask me to tell a pack of lies, darling?

PENELOPE: Only white ones, mother. If there's a whopper to tell, I'll tell it myself.

BEADSWORTH: But what about Barlow?

GOLIGHTLY: He's a man of the world. He's sure to put his foot in it.

PENELOPE: I'll settle him.

[*BARLOW comes in.*]

PENELOPE: Ah!

BARLOW: I could not get on to her. I don't know what's the matter with those telephone girls. Hussies!

PENELOPE: Uncle Davenport, I find I've been entirely mistaken about Dickie. He's not to blame in any way.

BARLOW: Good gracious me! And Ada Fergusson?

PENELOPE: Is, I have no doubt, no worse than anybody else.

BARLOW: This is a surprise. How on earth have you come to this conclusion?

PENELOPE: By adding two and two together.

BARLOW: Upon my word! I must say, it annoys me that I should have been forced to break an important engagement for no reason. I should have thought . . .

PENELOPE: [*Interrupting.*] Uncle Davenport, it's quite bad enough that I should be done out of a scene, but if you're going to make one it's more than I can stand.

BEADSWORTH: Well, as I can't be of any more use to you, I think I'll get back to the bosom of my family.

PENELOPE: Of course, I look upon this as a professional visit.

BEADSWORTH: Oh, nonsense!

PENELOPE: I couldn't dream of accepting your services for nothing. You must really let me know what I owe you.

BEADSWORTH: I really don't know what to say.

PENELOPE: Dickie charges a guinea when he goes to see anybody.

BEADSWORTH: You only mentioned six and eightpence in your telegram.

PENELOPE: Very well, I'll owe you that. It would really make me feel more comfortable.

BEADSWORTH: You're not going to hand it over in hard cash?

PENELOPE: I wasn't thinking of paying you. But I'd like to think I owed it you. You see, then, I shan't feel under any obligation.

BEADSWORTH: In that case I surrender. Good-bye.

PENELOPE: Good-bye.

BARLOW: Good-bye, Beadsworth. You must come and dine with me at the club one of these days.

BEADSWORTH: I should like to. Good-bye. *[Exit.]*

BARLOW: Very nice fellow. Quite a gentleman. No one would think he was a solicitor. I shall ask him to dinner with one or two people who don't matter.

PENELOPE: There's Dickie. D'you hear him whistling? He's evidently in the best of spirits.

[DICKIE comes in. He is a good-looking, well-dressed, professional man of five-and-thirty. He has boisterous spirits and high good humour. He is seldom put out of countenance. He has a charm of manner which explains PENELOPE'S infatuation.]

DICKIE: Hulloo! I couldn't make out what had become of you, Pen.

PENELOPE: Why?

DICKIE: You generally come down to meet me when I get in.

[PENELOPE gives a slight start and conceals a smile.]

PENELOPE: My sainted mother is here.

DICKIE: *[Gaily.]* That's no reason why you should neglect a devoted husband. *[Shaking hands with MRS. GOLIGHTLY.]* How is your sainted mother? Hulloo, Uncle Davenport, what price duchesses to-day?

BARLOW: I beg your pardon. I don't know what you mean.

DICKIE: *[Looking round at the decanters and glasses with which the room is scattered.]* I say, you've been doing yourselves rather proud, haven't you? Who's been drinking port?

PENELOPE: Nobody. It's an empty glass.

DICKIE: That's how providence behaves to me. Deliberately puts temptation in my way. It's simply poison.

Gout in my family, you know. My ancestors have lived on colchicum for a hundred years. I feel a tingling in my toes at the mere sight of a bottle of port. And yet I drink it.

[He fills himself a glass and sips it with great content.]

BARLOW: It's a great mistake, of course, to think that gout is a mark of good family. The porter of my club is a martyr to it.

DICKIE: Perhaps he's the illegitimate son of an earl. You should ask him if he has a strawberry mark on his left shoulder. What's the matter, Pen?

PENELOPE: *[Astonished.]* With me?

DICKIE: I thought you seemed a bit under the weather.

PENELOPE: Why?

DICKIE: I don't know. You're not quite up to your usual form, are you? You've not asked me what I've been doing to-day. As a rule you're so interested in my movements.

PENELOPE: *[With a glance at her father.]* I thought you'd tell me if you wanted to.

DICKIE: I say, I do think that's a bit thick. I go slaving my very soul out to provide you with a motor and nice frocks and things, and you don't take the smallest interest in what I do.

PENELOPE: *[Smiling.]* Well, what have you been doing this afternoon?

DICKIE: *[With a sigh of relief.]* Oh, I've had the very deuce of a day. I've got a very interesting case on just now. Taking up a lot of my time. Of course it worries me rather, but I suppose all these things come in the day's march. Well, I spent the best part of an hour there.

PENELOPE: An hour?

DICKIE: Yes, we had a consultation, you know.

PENELOPE: But you had a consultation yesterday.

DICKIE: Yesterday? Yes, she's a fussy old thing. She's always wanting consultations.

PENELOPE: That's jolly, isn't it?

DICKIE: I don't think it is. It looks as if she hadn't really confidence in me.

PENELOPE: On the other hand, you can charge double, can't you?

DICKIE: Yes, of course, it has that advantage.

PENELOPE: I've been hankering after an ermine stole for a long time. I shall buy it now.

DICKIE: [*His face falling.*] Oh, but I haven't been paid yet.

PENELOPE: They'll be only too glad to wait. And it's such a bargain.

DICKIE: [*To change the conversation.*] Well, after my consultation I was so fagged that I had to go to the club to have a rubber of bridge.

GOLIGHTLY: By the way, what is the name of your patient?

DICKIE: The name of my patient?

PENELOPE: Oh, yes, I was telling papa that you'd got a new patient who was bringing in pots of money. I couldn't remember her name.

DICKIE: [*Embarrassed.*] Oh—er, Mrs. Mac . . .

PENELOPE: Mrs. Mac what?

DICKIE: Mrs. Macnothing.

BARLOW: How d'you mean, Mrs. Macnothing? I've never heard of a family called Macnothing.

DICKIE: No, of course, her name isn't Macnothing.

BARLOW: But you distinctly said it was Mrs. Macnothing.

DICKIE: Now, my dear Pen, did I say anything about Macnothing?

PENELOPE: Well, what is her name then?

DICKIE: I've been telling you for the last ten minutes. Her name's Mrs. Mack.

BARLOW: Why on earth didn't you say so at once?

GOLIGHTLY: How did you find such a profitable patient?

DICKIE: Oh, it was a great piece of luck. She heard about me from that little friend of yours, Pen. What is her name?

GOLIGHTLY: You seem to have a very bad memory for names, Dickie. You should make a knot in your handkerchief.

DICKIE: It's a friend of Pen's. [*Pretending to try and remember.*] Her husband's in the navy, stationed at Malta, isn't he?

PENELOPE: Ada Fergusson.

DICKIE: That's it, of course. Mrs. Fergusson.

BARLOW: One of the Fergussons of Kingarth, I suppose?

DICKIE: I don't know at all. Quite a nice little thing, I thought. I must confess that she didn't interest me very much.

[*PEYTON comes in to announce MRS. FERGUSSON. MRS. FERGUSSON is a handsome, showy woman of about thirty.*]

PEYTON: Mrs. Fergusson.

[*DICKIE is filled with consternation. PEYTON goes out. There is a very brief moment of embarrassment, but PENELOPE quickly recovers herself and goes up to the visitor effusively.*]

PENELOPE: How d'you do?

MRS. FERGUSSON: Is it a preposterous hour to pay a call?

PENELOPE: Of course not. I'm always delighted to see you.

MRS. FERGUSSON: I've been shopping the whole afternoon, and it suddenly occurred to me that I hadn't seen you for ages.

PENELOPE: Do you know my sainted mother?

MRS. FERGUSSON: How d'you do?

PENELOPE: This is my noble father, and this is my uncle.

BARLOW: How d'you do?

[*He is evidently much struck by Mrs. FERGUSON.*]

MRS. FERGUSON: [*Turning blandly to DICKIE.*] You haven't forgotten me?

DICKIE: Of course not.

MRS. FERGUSON: We haven't met for ages, have we?

DICKIE: Simply ages.

MRS. FERGUSON: I passed you in Piccadilly the other day, and you cut me dead.

DICKIE: I'm so sorry, I'm so short-sighted.

PENELOPE: Dickie, you're not at all short-sighted. How can you tell such fibs?

BARLOW: [*With pompous gallantry.*] Dickie feels that only a physical impediment can excuse a man for not seeing a pretty woman.

MRS. FERGUSON: Oh, how very nice of you to say that.

BARLOW: Not at all, not at all.

PENELOPE: I wanted to thank you for getting Dickie such a splendid patient.

DICKIE: [*Hastily, seeing her look of astonishment.*] I've just been telling my wife about Mrs. Mack.

MRS. FERGUSON: [*Not in the least understanding.*] Oh, yes.

DICKIE: It was really awfully good of you to tell her to send for me. I've been to see her this afternoon.

MRS. FERGUSON: [*Understanding.*] Oh, yes, I like to do all I can for people. I hope you'll find her a nice patient.

PENELOPE: She seems to require a lot of visits.

MRS. FERGUSON: Yes, she was only telling me the other day how much she liked Dr. O'Farrell. I'm afraid she's very ill, poor dear.

DICKIE: To tell you the truth, I'm extremely worried about her.

MRS. FERGUSON: It's a great comfort to all her friends to know that Dr. O'Farrell is looking after her.

BARLOW: I've been wondering if she's one of the Staffordshire Macks or one of the Somersetshire Macks.

DICKIE: I don't know at all.

BARLOW: How d'you mean you don't know at all? She must be one or the other.

DICKIE: I don't see that it matters either way.

PENELOPE: What is she like?

DICKIE: Oh, I don't know. Like everybody else, I suppose.

PENELOPE: Don't be silly, Dickie. You must know if she's fat or thin.

DICKIE: [*Looking at Mrs. FERGUSON.*] I should say fat, wouldn't you?

MRS. FERGUSON: Obese.

PENELOPE: Yes?

DICKIE: She has grey hair.

MRS. FERGUSON: All in little corkscrew curls.

DICKIE: [*Laughing.*] Yes. I wonder how she does them.

MRS. FERGUSON: She has very pretty blue eyes, hasn't she?

DICKIE: Yes, very pretty blue eyes.

PENELOPE: What is her Christian name?

DICKIE: Er—I don't know at all.

MRS. FERGUSON: [*Promptly.*] Catherine.

PENELOPE: Catherine Mack? Mother, it's your old friend Catherine Mack. What an extraordinary coincidence!

GOLIGHTLY: Catherine Mack. Why, of course, I remember her perfectly. Little grey corkscrew curls and very pretty blue eyes.

PENELOPE: Wouldn't she like mamma to go and see her?

DICKIE: I'm afraid she can't see any one just yet.

GOLIGHTLY: You must tell her how sorry we are to hear she's so ill.

DICKIE: Oh, yes, I'll give her any message you like.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: [*Rather stiffly, getting up.*] I think I ought to be going. Will you come, Charles?

GOLIGHTLY: Yes, my dear.

PENELOPE: Good-bye, mother, darling.

[*They talk aside as MRS. GOLIGHTLY is helped on with her cloak. DICKIE is left practically alone with MRS. FERGUSSON.*]

DICKIE: [*In an undertone.*] I say, what the dickens have you come here for now?

MRS. FERGUSSON: You didn't tell me when I should see you to-morrow.

DICKIE: Good heavens, you might have rung me up on the telephone.

MRS. FERGUSSON: Oh, I never trust the telephone.

DICKIE: How do you mean you never trust the telephone? Are you in the habit . . .

MRS. FERGUSSON: Dickie!

DICKIE: I beg your pardon, I didn't mean that.

MRS. FERGUSSON: Why on earth did you invent that cock-and-bull story about Mrs. Mack?

DICKIE: I didn't. It invented itself. I was obliged to account for my movements.

MRS. FERGUSSON: D'you mean to say your wife asks you where you've been and where you're going. How like a woman. [*Innocently.*] By the way, what are you doing this evening?

DICKIE: [*With amusement.*] Oh, Penelope and I are dining at the Carlton grill room, and going to a music hall.

[*BARLOW comes up to them.*]

BARLOW: Good-bye, Mrs. Fergusson.

MRS. FERGUSSON: [*Effusively.*] Good-bye.

BARLOW: [*To PENELOPE, as he shakes hands with her.*] Devilish fine woman.

PENELOPE: [*Pretending to be outraged.*] Uncle Davenport!

BARLOW: Good-bye, dear. Quite a lady.

PENELOPE: Good-bye. [*BARLOW and MRS. GOLIGHTLY go out.*]

GOLIGHTLY: [*As he is following.*] Are you all right?

PENELOPE: Yes, leave it to me. I'm beginning to feel my feet.

GOLIGHTLY: [*With a smile.*] I noticed it. [*GOLIGHTLY goes out.*]
MRS. FERGUSSON: Charming man your uncle is, Penelope.
So distinguished.

PENELOPE: You've made a conquest of him. He told me you were a devilish fine woman.

MRS. FERGUSSON: Not really? Men often tell me I'm a womanly woman.

PENELOPE: I daresay it means the same thing.

MRS. FERGUSSON: But I must fly too. I really had no idea it was so late.

PENELOPE: Are you doing anything to-night?

MRS. FERGUSSON: Oh, no! I live very quietly. There's nothing that I enjoy more than an evening all by myself, with a book.

PENELOPE: You used to be so fond of going out.

MRS. FERGUSSON: I know that my husband prefers me to remain at home. And when I think of him bravely serving his country in a foreign land I have no heart for gaiety.

PENELOPE: What a charming nature you have.

MRS. FERGUSSON: [*To DICKIE.*] My husband's in a man-of-war. He's stationed at Malta, you know. It's so dreadful that my health forces me to remain in England.

PENELOPE: I wonder if you'd do me a great kindness,

MRS. FERGUSSON: My dear, I'll always do anything for an old friend.

PENELOPE: The fact is, I've had a perfectly fiendish headache the whole afternoon.

DICKIE: [*Triumphantly.*] I knew there was something the matter with you the moment I came in.

PENELOPE: We've got a couple of stalls for a music hall to-night. It would be awfully kind of you if you'd go with Dickie instead of me.

[*A look of intelligence passes between DICKIE and MRS. FERGUSSON.*]

MRS. FERGUSSON: IP

PENELOPE: Dickie hates going out alone, and I simply can't stir. You can have a jolly little dinner together at a restaurant, and you can go on afterwards.

DICKIE: Are you really sure you can't go, Pen?

PENELOPE: It's absolutely out of the question.

MRS. FERGUSSON: Don't you think Dr. O'Farrell ought to stay and look after you?

PENELOPE: Oh, no! It'll do him good to go out. He's been working so dreadfully hard. This afternoon he had a consultation that lasted nearly an hour.

MRS. FERGUSSON: [*To DICKIE.*] Would you like me to come with you?

DICKIE: I should love it, if it wouldn't bore you.

MRS. FERGUSSON: Then I shall be delighted.

PENELOPE: Thanks so much. But it's getting very late. I think you ought to start at once.

DICKIE: You're sure you don't mind my leaving you, Penelope?

PENELOPE: Positive.

DICKIE: Well, just wait a moment, and I'll make you up a dose of something.

PENELOPE: [*Hastily.*] Oh, no, I promise you I'm much better without medicine.

DICKIE: Nonsense. Of course I must give you something.
[*He goes out.*]

MRS. FERGUSSON: That's the advantage of having a doctor in the family.

PENELOPE: [*Crassly.*] Yes, it's a great advantage.

MRS. FERGUSSON: I do envy you, having your husband always at hand. When I think of mine bravely serving his country—and you know, every doctor I go to tells me it would be most dangerous for me to join him.

[*Dickie comes in with a little medicine glass, filled with a milky fluid.*]

DICKIE: Here it is.

PENELOPE: Oh, no, Dickie, I'd much rather not.

DICKIE: Don't be silly, darling. This'll pull you together like anything.

MRS. FERGUSSON: I'm sure she ought to lie down.

PENELOPE: No, I think I'd rather stand up if you don't mind.

DICKIE: How extraordinarily unreasonable you are! Now lie down on this sofa.

PENELOPE: Of course, if I absolutely must.

[*She lies down on a sofa.*]

MRS. FERGUSSON: We must make you comfortable before we go.

DICKIE: Let's put all the cushions behind her. Is that nice?

PENELOPE: Yes, thank you.

DICKIE: Poor little thing.

MRS. FERGUSSON: I'm sure she ought to have something over her feet.

DICKIE: Let's put this rug over her feet. There. Now take this medicine. . . . There . . .

PENELOPE: Oh, no, Dickie. I'll take it after you've gone. I really will. I promise you I'll take it.

DICKIE: Why on earth can't you take it now?

PENELOPE: Well, I hate making faces before you.

DICKIE: But I've often seen you make faces.

PENELOPE: Yes, at you. That's quite a different thing.

DICKIE: Now, take it like a good girl.

PENELOPE: After you've gone.

MRS. FERGUSON: [*With great determination.*] I'm not going to stir from this room till you've taken it.

PENELOPE: [*Resigned.*] Give it me. Hold my nose, Dickie. [*She swallows it and makes a face.*] Oh, I wish I'd never married you, Dickie.

DICKIE: It'll make you feel like one o'clock.

PENELOPE: I don't want to feel like one o'clock.

MRS. FERGUSON: Good-bye. So sorry you're feeling seedy.

DICKIE: Good-bye, darling.

PENELOPE: I hope you'll have an awfully good time.

[*DICKIE and MRS. FERGUSON go out. PENELOPE springs up, throws the cushions angrily aside, makes one or two quick steps towards the door as though to call them back, then stops.*]

PENELOPE: No, I won't. I won't.

[*She comes slowly back, then sinks down and bursts into tears.*]

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

THE SECOND ACT

SCENE: DR. O'FARRELL'S consulting-room. *It is a comfortably furnished room, with engravings on the walls, photographs in silver frames, and flowers on the chimney-piece. There is a large desk on one side, with papers on it, books, and a reading-lamp. There is a revolving-chair for DICKIE to sit in, and a chair on the other side of the desk for the patient. On a side table are a microscope, a stand for test tubes, one or two medicine bottles, a row of large bottles containing chemicals, and an electric lamp. There is a sofa without arms for patients to lie upon, and there are two or three chairs besides. On the shelves are medical books. On a little table is a pile of The Lancet.*

DICKIE *is sitting at his desk, with his stethoscope still in his ears. A patient is standing up, buttoning up his braces. He puts on his waistcoat and coat as the conversation proceeds. He is a very timid little man, with a bald head and gold spectacles. He has an intensely nervous, apologetic manner.*

DICKIE: I'll just write you out a prescription, shall I?

PATIENT: Oh, it's too good of you. I'm afraid I'm giving you so much trouble.

DICKIE: Not at all. Now what would you like me to give you?

PATIENT: [*Dreadfully embarrassed.*] Oh, whatever you like, please. It's too good of you.

DICKIE: You know, there's not much the matter with you.

PATIENT: Oh, I'm so sorry. I really, really . . .

DICKIE: I should have thought you'd be rather pleased.

PATIENT: [*Apologetically.*] Yes, of course, I'm very much pleased. I didn't mean that. I've taken up so much of your time.

DICKIE: It's only out of the people who've got nothing the matter with them that I make a living. The people who are ill either get well or die, and that's the end of them.

PATIENT: Yes, I see. I never thought of that. Beautiful day it is, isn't it?

DICKIE: Won't you sit down?

PATIENT: Oh, it's too good of you. Thank you, thank you. I'm afraid I'm taking up so much of your time.

DICKIE: I always make my patients sit on the other side of my desk since one of them suddenly saw a snake on me, and flung himself at my throat in order to save me from being bitten. He nearly throttled me in the process, and when I knelt on his chest, he said I was an ungrateful devil, and he wouldn't interfere with the snakes next time they went for me.

PATIENT: [*Extremely agitated.*] Oh, but you don't think there's any danger of my flying at your throat, do you?

DICKIE: [*With a laugh.*] No, of course not.

PATIENT: I drink nothing for my luncheon, and only claret and water for my dinner.

DICKIE: I suppose you wouldn't think you'd had your money's worth if I gave you no medicine?

PATIENT: Oh, it's too good of you, but I think, for my wife's sake, I'd like to take something.

DICKIE: Well, look here, I've given you some strychnine to buck you up, and some bismuth to quiet you down. Take it three times a day after meals.

PATIENT: Oh, thank you so much. I'm sure it's just what I want. And now—er. And now—er . . .

[*He gets up, overcome with embarrassment.*]

DICKIE: I think there's nothing more I can do for you.

PATIENT: No, er—thank you very much. I—er—it's so good of you to have taken so much trouble. Yes, er . . .

DICKIE: [*Understanding.*] Oh . . . My fee is two guineas.

PATIENT: [*Infinitely relieved.*] Oh, thank you so much. That's just what I wanted to ask you. Shall I write you a cheque?

DICKIE: We always prefer to have it in hard cash, you know, in case it's a bogus cheque.

PATIENT: Oh, certainly. It's too good of you. I thought you mightn't like it.

DICKIE: It's extraordinary how nervous people are about giving a doctor money. If you only knew how jolly glad he is to get it.

PATIENT: Yes. Thank you very much.

[*The patient takes two guineas out of his pocket and puts them nervously on the chimney-piece*]

DICKIE: Hang it all, man, not on the mantelpiece. There are limits.

PATIENT: Oh, I beg your pardon. I'm so sorry.

DICKIE: We always like it put on the desk.

PATIENT: I don't often come and consult doctors.

DICKIE: I can see that. If you did you'd probably give me two pounds and say you hadn't got two shillings on you, especially if you were a woman.

PATIENT: You don't say so. Really it never occurred to me.

DICKIE: Thank you. Well, good-bye.

PATIENT: Good-bye, and thank you so much. Beautiful day, isn't it? Good-bye.

[*DICKIE leads him to the door and shows him out. At the door he sees GOLIGHTLY.*]

DICKIE: Hullo! Come in, won't you? [*Calling upstairs.*]
Pen, here's your noble parent.

[*GOLIGHTLY comes in.*]

GOLIGHTLY: I was just going up to see Pen.

DICKIE: Come and sit down here, and we'll have a smoke.

GOLIGHTLY: Aren't you expecting patients?

DICKIE: Oh, it's just on five o'clock. I don't suppose any one else will come. We might have tea down here.

GOLIGHTLY: How are things going?

DICKIE: Rotten. Look here, a wretched two guineas. That's all I've made this afternoon.

[PENELOPE *comes in*.

PENELOPE: Well, father?

GOLIGHTLY: Kiss your noble parent, my child. You've got a new dress on.

PENELOPE: I rather like it, don't you?

DICKIE: Is that another new frock, Pen?

PENELOPE: Yes, darling. Why?

DICKIE: Oh, nothing.

PENELOPE: The wife of a fashionable physician has to spend a lot of money on her clothes.

GOLIGHTLY: Dickie was lamenting that times were very bad.

DICKIE: What can you expect with this beastly weather! Fine, dry and cold day after day. We haven't had a fog this autumn. It doesn't give one a chance. Of course everybody keeps well. Times are getting worse and worse. Everybody has decent drains now. An officious Government gives people pure water. If it weren't for patent medicines and the hypochondriac half the doctors in London would starve.

PENELOPE: Never mind, Dickie. There may be a motor accident just outside our front door one of these days.

DICKIE: It would be just like my luck if they were all killed outright. No, what I want is a really good epidemic, a very complicated form of influenza that'd keep people on their backs for about a month.

PENELOPE: And supposing I got it?

DICKIE: Well, if you got it that boulder on the other side of the street would have to treat you. And he couldn't

charge you as you're my wife, and he'd simply grind his teeth at having to waste his time.

PENELOPE: The boulder on the other side of the street is Dr. Rogers. I like him much better than Dickie.

DICKIE: Pompous ass.

PENELOPE: He's got such a pleasant bedside manner.

DICKIE: You've never seen my bedside manner. [*Looking at his hands.*] I say, I must just go and wash my hands, they're covered with Picric Acid. [*Exit.*]

PENELOPE: Where's mother? Converting the heathen?

GOLIGHTLY: From the safe distance of the Albert Hall.

PENELOPE: [*With a change of manner.*] I'm glad you came alone.

GOLIGHTLY: Is anything the matter?

PENELOPE: [*Breaking out.*] I can't go on with it any longer. I've come to the end of my strength.

GOLIGHTLY: Is Dickie still . . . ?

PENELOPE: Yes. I can't imagine what he sees in her. I sit and watch her sometimes and wonder what she has that I haven't got. You don't think I'm plain, do you?

GOLIGHTLY: Certainly not. If you had been I should have exposed you at your birth, like the ancient Spartans.

PENELOPE: There are lots of men who are willing to tell me that I'm extremely attractive.

GOLIGHTLY: Why don't you let them?

PENELOPE: My dear father, you're the most immoral parent I've ever come across.

GOLIGHTLY: [*With a little deprecatory shrug.*] It might be politic.

PENELOPE: [*Shaking her head.*] No, I don't know whether I shall ever get Dickie back again, but I don't want to get him back by exciting his jealousy. I don't want his love if I can only have it by making him think other men are in love with me.

GOLIGHTLY: Remember that two and two never make five.

PENELOPE: [*Impatiently.*] It's easy enough to give advice. You've only got to sit still and watch. I've got to do things. And the worst of it is that doing things means doing nothing.

GOLIGHTLY: My dear.

PENELOPE: Now, father, don't look as if you didn't understand or I shall throw something at your head. It wouldn't be so bad if I could be up and doing, but I just have to sit still and keep my temper. You don't know what I've suffered this month with a smiling face. I've laughed while my heart ached. I've chaffed Dickie when I've known he was just going to meet Ada Fergusson. I've arranged little parties so that they might be together. I haven't even dared to cry by myself in case Ada Fergusson should see that my eyes were red and tell Dickie. He's seen her every day, every single day for the last month, and all the time I've been cheerful and pleasant and amusing.

GOLIGHTLY: But how does he manage to get the time?

PENELOPE: Of course he's been neglecting his practice. He's sent his assistant to people he ought to have seen himself. You remember Mrs. Mack, don't you?

GOLIGHTLY [*smiling*]: The imaginary Mrs. Mack? Yes.

PENELOPE: If you knew how I hated Mrs. Mack! She's been having operations. She has an operation about once a week, and Dickie goes off for the whole day in his car.

GOLIGHTLY: She must have the constitution of a boa-constrictor.

PENELOPE: And the curious thing is that she always has an operation when there's a race meeting. She had an operation for the Duke of York's Stakes at Kempton; and she had another operation for the Cesarewitch, and a third for Sandown.

GOLIGHTLY: How very singular.

PENELOPE: It is till you know that Ada Fergusson adores racing. And the thing that makes me so furious is that I'm quite certain Dickie puts on her money for her; and when her horse wins she pockets the profits, and when it loses she doesn't pay her stake.

GOLIGHTLY: That sounds very nasty of her. What makes you think it?

PENELOPE: I do it myself. . . . Poor Dickie, it's going to cost him a lot of money this month.

GOLIGHTLY: Why?

PENELOPE: Because whenever he goes out for the day I have to console myself by buying something. I generally choose something rather dear.

GOLIGHTLY: I don't remember that I advised that in the treatment of a volatile husband.

PENELOPE: No, I added it of my own accord.

GOLIGHTLY: But why did you send for me to-day?

PENELOPE: Because the end has come. And I can't stand it any longer. This morning Dickie said that Mrs. Mack was well enough to be moved, and he was going to take her over to Paris to put her in the Riviera train.

GOLIGHTLY: Do you mean to say that. . . .

PENELOPE: [*With an angry shrug of the shoulders.*] Ada Fergusson wants a little jaunt in Paris.

GOLIGHTLY: What are you going to do?

PENELOPE: I'm going to tell him he must choose between us. I'm going to do everything I can to prevent him from going. And I mean to let him know that if he goes it's the end.

GOLIGHTLY: Oh!

PENELOPE: Don't say oh! Say I'm quite right. Say it's the only thing to do.

GOLIGHTLY: But I think you're quite wrong.

PENELOPE: Wrong!

GOLIGHTLY: You don't suppose he wants to go to Paris. No man in his senses would take the risk.

PENELOPE: Then why is he going?

GOLIGHTLY: Because she's making him. And once a woman in these circumstances makes a man do what he doesn't want to, it's the beginning of the end.

PENELOPE: How d'you know?

GOLIGHTLY: I don't know. I guess it.

PENELOPE: It seems to me that a lifetime spent in the study of mathematics has resulted in some very various knowledge.

GOLIGHTLY: Be a good girl, Pen, and let them go.

[There is a pause while PENELOPE, resting her face on her hands, looks straight at her father. She thinks the matter out.]

PENELOPE: You were right when you said I should want a great deal of tact, and a great deal of patience, and a great deal of self-control. My word!

GOLIGHTLY *[smiling]*: Well?

PENELOPE: I'll do nothing. I'll hold my tongue, I'll smile, I'll make jokes, but . . .

GOLIGHTLY: Yes?

PENELOPE: I want some hats badly. I'll just go and ring up Françoise and tell her to send me all she's got in the shop.

[DICKIE comes in.]

GOLIGHTLY: I was just going.

DICKIE: I'm sorry. Why so soon?

GOLIGHTLY: I promised to fetch my wife.

PENELOPE: You must come back. This is the first time I've been separated from Dickie since our marriage, and I shall want to hide my head in the maternal bosom while my noble father pats my hand.

DICKIE: I wish you wouldn't take it so calmly, Pen. You might be a bit cut up.

PENELOPE: But, darling, I'm making every preparation to have fit after fit of violent hysterics. I can't do more.

DICKIE: Rot me, that's right.

PENELOPE: [*With meaning.*] After all, Dickie, I know you wouldn't go if you could help it. It's only because you feel it's your duty, isn't it?

[*DICKIE is rather uncomfortable, but says nothing. GOLIGHTLY breaks the momentary silence.*]

GOLIGHTLY: Why are you going by night?

DICKIE: [*Relieved.*] Oh, you see, there's so much less of a crowd. It's more convenient when you're carting an invalid about.

PENELOPE: [*Gaily.*] It'll be great fun, because you'll see all the gay young men who are making a little excursion to Paris with the objects of their affections. I'm told they always go by night so that no one should see them on the journey.

GOLIGHTLY: Well, I must be getting on or I shall be late.
Au revoir.

PENELOPE: Don't be too long, father, in case my emotions get the better of me before you come back.

GOLIGHTLY: [*Nodding.*] I may see you later, Dickie.

[*He goes out. PENELOPE makes as if to follow him.*]

PENELOPE: I'm going upstairs to have tea.

DICKIE: [*Rather stiffly.*] I'd like to have a little talk with you, Pen.

PENELOPE: Then come up into the drawing-room.

DICKIE: I'd rather talk to you down here.

PENELOPE: [*Sitting down.*] Very well. Talk.

DICKIE: You can send for the tea if you like.

PENELOPE: No; I'll let it stand and ruin my digestion!

DICKIE: [*Taking papers out of his pocket and giving them to* PENELOPE.] D'you know what these are?

PENELOPE: [*With a charming smile.*] Bills, darling?

DICKIE: I can see they're bills, thank you?

PENELOPE: [*Flourishing one of them.*] This is for the frock I've got on. You wouldn't think it cost so much, would you?
[*Looking down at it.*] You see, you have to pay for the cut.

DICKIE: [*Trying to keep his temper.*] And what do you expect me to do with them?

PENELOPE: [*Indifferently.*] You can put them in the waste-paper basket if you like, but it would be shorter to pay them.

DICKIE: [*Flying into a passion.*] Now, look here, Pen. It's perfectly preposterous. You know I'm not going to stand this sort of thing.

PENELOPE: [*Apparently much astonished, quite good-humouredly.*] Darling, you're not going to make a scene for a few little things I've bought myself. I was positively in rags, and I thought you liked me to dress neatly.

DICKIE: Hang it all, I'm a poor man, and you've spent more than a hundred and fifty pounds in this one month.

PENELOPE: [*Calmly.*] Does it come to as much as that? It's lucky you've got such a good patient in Mrs. Mack, isn't it?

[*He gives her a suspicious look, but to get away from MRS. MACK breaks out angrily.*]

DICKIE: Senseless extravagance I call it. Now look here, here's thirty-five pounds for a dress in blue cloth—absurd price to pay—on the 9th of October.

PENELOPE: Duke of York's Stakes at Kempton.

DICKIE: How d'you mean, Duke of York's Stakes at Kempton?

PENELOPE: I just happen to remember they were on that day because Madame Claude was so surprised to see me. It

was only be the merest chance that she hadn't gone to the races herself.

DICKIE: But what on earth put it into your head to go and buy a blue cloth dress?

PENELOPE: [*Sweetly.*] Well, you see, darling, it was the day of the first operation that was performed on Mrs. Mack. And you were away all day, and I felt awfully depressed and lonely. And I knew how anxious you were, and it made me anxious, so I just went and ordered a blue cloth to cheer myself up a bit.

[*DICKIE looks at her for a moment, then looks down at the bill, is about to speak, but says nothing. PENELOPE watches him.*

DICKIE: [*Suddenly.*] And look here, on the 13th of October there's an ermine stole and a muff.

PENELOPE: Yes, that was the second operation on poor Mrs. Mack.

DICKIE: I say, I think it's a bit thick.

PENELOPE: Well, I had to do something while you were away. And it made me feel so miserable to see everybody driving off with race glasses to Liverpool Street.

DICKIE: I beg your pardon.

PENELOPE: You see, the 13th of October was the Cesarewitch.

DICKIE: And I suppose all the others are to be explained in the same way. [*Looking at a bill.*] October 22.

PENELOPE: Sandown Races. [*DICKIE looks through the bill crossly, but does not speak.*] I wonder why you always had your operations on the same day as an important race meeting.

DICKIE: I suppose you think it odd?

PENELOPE: A little.

DICKIE: Well, it isn't odd at all. It's one of old Peter Marsden's cranky ways. I told you it was Peter Marsden

who did the operations, didn't I? [PENELOPE *nods.*] The fact is, he's simply mad on racing. And he's lost such a pot of money that he always fixes an important operation for the same day as a race meeting so that he absolutely won't be able to go to it.

PENELOPE: Funny old thing. [DICKIE *looks up suspiciously. With a laugh.*] Peter Marsden, not you, darling.

DICKIE: Now look here, Pen, we'll say no more about these bills. I'll pay them this time . . .

PENELOPE: I knew you would.

DICKIE: But there must be no more of them.

PENELOPE: I really don't know why you should make such a fuss. After all, you've been earning simply heaps and heaps of money with Mrs. Mack.

DICKIE: We mustn't count our chickens before they're hatched. I haven't had a penny out of her yet.

PENELOPE: But now that she's going away you can send in your bill.

DICKIE: Oh, I couldn't possibly. It would kill her.

PENELOPE: Don't you think you might risk it?

DICKIE: I think you're awfully heartless, Pen. You forget that I'm very much attached to the old lady. I look upon her as a friend as well as a patient.

PENELOPE: Perhaps she'll leave you something in her will. We want a new electric brougham, don't we?

DICKIE: Oh, I shouldn't accept it. I have the strongest feeling against doctors getting legacies from their patients.

PENELOPE: Well, you'll be able to charge at least a hundred and fifty pounds for taking her to Paris.

DICKIE: [With a start.] Pen!

PENELOPE: Oh, you made me jump.

DICKIE: You're not proposing to buy anything more?

PENELOPE: Well, darling, I know that when I get up to-morrow morning and you're not here, I shall feel dreadfully lonely and depressed.

DICKIE: [*Interrupting.*] Have your sainted mother to stay with you.

PENELOPE: And it's struck me that I simply haven't got a hat I can wear.

DICKIE: [*Sternly.*] Penelope.

PENELOPE: [*Persuasively.*] It'll make my frocks last so much longer if I have some nice hats. You see, you ring the changes, and people think you have a new gown on.

DICKIE: And may I venture to inquire how many hats you'll want to overcome your depression.

PENELOPE: [*Decidedly.*] Three.

DICKIE: I never heard anything so preposterous.

PENELOPE: Now look here, Dickie, I'm willing to meet you half way; I promise you they shan't cost more than five pounds each. You can afford that out of the hundred and fifty.

DICKIE: The fact is, Pen, that Mrs. Mack is more a friend than a patient, and she's not so well to do as I thought. I'm proposing to make no charge for accompanying her to Paris.

PENELOPE: [*Quite firmly.*] Oh, no, Dickie, I won't hear of it. You've got a wife to think of—if you died to-morrow I should be totally unprovided for. You have no right to be quixotic. It's not fair to me.

[*DICKIE is just going to answer when PEYTON comes in.*]

PEYTON: A lady wishes to see you, sir.

DICKIE: [*Irritably.*] At this hour?

PEYTON: It's Mrs. Watson, sir.

DICKIE: Oh, yes, I know. Show her in.

[*Exit PEYTON.*]

DICKIE: Thank heaven, there's somebody. I'll get a few

guineas out of her at all events. [*Looking at his case book.*] Four visits. That'll be five guineas. By Jove, I want them.

PENELOPE: What's the matter with her?

DICKIE: I don't know, but I'm pretending I do. And she probably won't find out.

PENELOPE: I'll leave you. I must just telephone to someone.

[*She goes out. DICKIE walks up and down irritably.*

When MRS. WATSON appears he at once puts on his professional manner, and is very bland and affable.

MRS. WATSON is a little old lady in black.

DICKIE: Well, Mrs. Watson?

MRS. WATSON: You mustn't mind my coming so late. I know you don't see any one after five, but I'm going away.

DICKIE: I'm delighted to see you. I promise you that.

MRS. WATSON: I'm starting for the Riviera with my daughter to-morrow, and I thought I'd like to see you again before I went.

DICKIE: Of course. And how have you been getting on?

MRS. WATSON: [*With the keenest satisfaction.*] Oh! I don't get on. I never get better.

DICKIE: Have you been taking your medicine regularly?

MRS. WATSON: [*Cheerfully.*] Yes; but it doesn't do me any good.

DICKIE: Let's try your knee jerks, shall we?

[*MRS. WATSON crosses one leg over the other, and DICKIE taps below the knee; the leg is slightly jerked up.*

DICKIE: That seems right enough.

MRS. WATSON: Sir Benjamin Broadstairs tried everything, and he couldn't cure me; and then I went to Sir William Wilson, and he told me not to do any of the things that Sir Benjamin Broadstairs told me to do, and I got worse and worse!

DICKIE: You seem uncommonly cheerful about it.

MRS. WATSON: I've been to every doctor in London, and they all say I'm a wonderful case. I like being examined by doctors, and they take such an interest in me. The hours and hours they've spent over me. I can never be grateful enough for all the kindness I've had from them.

DICKIE: It's very nice of you to say so. I think I'll try you on something else to-day.

MRS. WATSON: Oh, make it nice and strong; won't you, doctor?

DICKIE: You seem to like your medicine with some body in it.

MRS. WATSON: Well, I like taking medicines. It's something to do; and now my daughter's married I'm very much alone. I think I've taken every medicine in the Pharmacopœia, and they've none of them done me any good.

DICKIE: [*Handing her a prescription.*] Well, perhaps this will. You must take it three times a day before meals.

MRS. WATSON: [*Looking at it.*] Oh, but I've had this before, Dr. O'Farrell. Sir Arthur Thomas gave me this only a few months ago.

DICKIE: Well, try it again. Perhaps you didn't give it a fair chance.

MRS. WATSON: I was reading in the *Lancet* the other day that a German doctor had discovered a new medicine which does nerve cases such a lot of good. I'm sure it's the very thing for me.

DICKIE: What on earth were you reading the *Lancet* for?

MRS. WATSON: Oh, I always read the *Lancet* and the *British Medical Journal*. You see, my poor husband had to take them in for his practice.

DICKIE: [*With a gasp.*] You don't mean to say your husband was a doctor?

MRS. WATSON: Oh, I thought I told you that I was a doctor's widow.

[DICKIE *tries to master his agitation while* MRS. WATSON *prattles on.*

MRS. WATSON: I can never bear to hear doctors spoken badly of. They never do me any good, but they've been kindness itself. I've only once been rudely treated, and that—if you'll believe it—was by a mere nobody. I told him all my symptoms, and he said to me, Madam, can you eat? Yes, I said. I have breakfast in the morning and a little soup at eleven o'clock; and then I have lunch, and I always make a good tea, and I eat a little dinner at half-past seven, and before I go to bed I have some bread and milk. Then he said, Madam, can you sleep? Yes, I said, for an old woman I sleep very well; I sleep eight or nine hours regularly. Then he said, Madam, can you walk? Oh! yes, I said, I always make a point of walking four miles a day. Then he said, My opinion is that you've got nothing the matter with you at all. Good afternoon.

DICKIE: Fancy.

MRS. WATSON: Well, I just looked him up and down, and I said to him, Sir, your opinion is not shared by Sir Benjamin Broadstairs, or Sir William Wilson, or Sir Arthur Thomas. And I didn't even offer him a fee, but I just swept out of the room. [*Archly.*] You won't give me that new medicine?

DICKIE: Honestly, I don't think it's quite what you want.

MRS. WATSON: Very well. I expect you know best. And now I mustn't take up any more of your time.

DICKIE: [*Sarcastically.*] Oh, it's of no value, thank you.

MRS. WATSON: [*Persuasively.*] Will you tell me what I owe you?

DICKIE: Oh, as a doctor's widow, of course, I couldn't dream of accepting a fee.

MRS. WATSON: That is kind of you. But you must allow me to give you a little present.

DICKIE: [*Rather feebly, but brightening up a little.*] Oh, really, you know . . .

MRS. WATSON: I've seen every doctor in London of any importance, and they've none of them charged me a penny, but I always make them a little present. I know that you doctors have to go out in all weathers, and you never wrap yourselves up. So I give them a woollen comforter.

[*She takes out of her bag a large red woollen comforter.*]

DICKIE: [*Blankly.*] Oh, thank you very much.

MRS. WATSON: I made it myself.

DICKIE: Did you!

MRS. WATSON: And Sir Benjamin promised to wear his every winter. You'll find it so warm.

DICKIE: I'm very grateful to you.

MRS. WATSON: And now, good-bye, and thank you so much.

DICKIE: When you come back from the Riviera, you might do worse than consult Dr. Rogers. He lives just at the other end of the street, you know. He's very good in cases like yours.

MRS. WATSON: Thank you so much.

DICKIE: Good-bye.

[*She goes out, and he shuts the door. He runs to the other and calls out.*]

DICKIE: Pen! Pen!

PENELOPE'S VOICE: Yes.

[*There is a knock at the door.*]

DICKIE: [*Irritably.*] Come in.

[*MRS. WATSON enters.*]

MRS. WATSON: I knew there was something I wanted to ask you particularly, and I nearly forgot it. Sir Benjamin

Broadstairs said I ought never to eat anything but toast, and Sir William Wilson said he didn't think toast was at all good for me, and I only ought to eat bread. Now, I wonder what I had better do?

DICKIE: [*Seriously, as if he were deliberating.*] Well, if I were you, I'd eat bread toasted only on one side.

MRS. WATSON: Thank you so much. Good-bye. I hope you'll like the comforter.

DICKIE: I'm sure I shall. Good-bye.

[*She goes out again, and DICKIE shuts the door.*]

DICKIE: Pen! Pen!

[*PENELOPE comes in by the other door.*]

PENELOPE: What is the matter?

[*DICKIE goes up to her furiously with the comforter in his hands.*]

DICKIE: Look! That's my feel! That!

PENELOPE: It's a woollen comforter.

DICKIE: Don't be idiotic, Penelope. I can see it's a woollen comforter.

PENELOPE: But what's the meaning of it?

DICKIE: She's a doctor's widow. Of course I couldn't charge her anything. She kept it dark till to-day. I'll tell you what, doctors' widows oughtn't to be allowed to survive their husbands.

PENELOPE: Oh!

DICKIE: When you're my widow, Pen, you go right up one side of Harley Street and then right down the other and see them all.

PENELOPE: But supposing I'm not ill?

DICKIE: Hang it all, when you've lost me the least you can do is to enjoy indifferent health.

[*PEYTON comes in.*]

PEYTON: If you please, sir, Mrs. Watson says, may she just see you for one minute.

DICKIE: [*Resigned.*] Yes.

[*Exit PEYTON.*

DICKIE: What the dickens does she want now?

[*PEYTON shows MRS. WATSON in.*

MRS. WATSON: You'll think you've never seen the last of me.

DICKIE: [*Blandly.*] Not at all. Not at all.

MRS. WATSON: I've been thinking about what you said about toasting my bread on one side. . . . On which side shall I put the butter?

DICKIE: [*With his chin in his hand.*] H'm. H'm. You must put the butter on the toasted side.

MRS. WATSON: Oh, thank you. Now just one more question, do you think a little jam would hurt me?

DICKIE: No, I don't think a little jam would hurt you, but you mustn't put it on the same side as you put the butter.

MRS. WATSON: Oh, thank you. Good afternoon. I'm so much obliged.

DICKIE: Not at all. Not at all.

[*MRS. WATSON goes out.*

DICKIE: [*Shaking his fist at the door.*] Suttee. . . . That's the word. Suttee.

PENELOPE: Dickie, what are you talking about?

DICKIE: I've been trying to think of it for ten minutes. That's what doctors' widows ought to do—Suttee. Like the Hindoos.

PENELOPE: Burn themselves alive at their husbands' death?

DICKIE: You've hit it. Suttee. That's the word.

PENELOPE: But, darling, I should hate to grace your funeral by making a bonfire of myself.

DICKIE: Oh, you have no affection for me.

PENELOPE: Lots, but that's asking a great deal, isn't it?

DICKIE: No, you don't care for me as much as you used to. You're quite different. I've noticed lots of things.

PENELOPE: [*With a rapid glance at him, but keeping her chaffing manner.*] Oh, nonsense.

DICKIE: You've changed lately. You never come down to see me off in the morning, and you don't ask me at what time I'm coming back. You always used to sit on the arm of my chair after breakfast when I was smoking my pipe and reading the paper.

PENELOPE: You must have hated it, didn't you?

DICKIE: Of course I hated it, but it showed you were fond of me, and now that you don't do it any more I miss it.

[PEYTON comes in, followed by MRS. FERGUSSON, and withdraws.]

PEYTON: Mrs. Fergusson.

[DICKIE gives a slight start, and shows faint signs of annoyance. He cannot make out what MRS. FERGUSSON has come for.]

MRS. FERGUSSON: The maid told me you were here, so I asked her to show me straight in. I hope you don't mind.

PENELOPE: Of course not. We're delighted to see you anywhere. Won't you have some tea?

MRS. FERGUSSON: No, thank you. The fact is, I've come to see Dr. O'Farrell professionally.

PENELOPE: You're not ill?

MRS. FERGUSSON: I've not been very well lately, and I thought I'd like to see a doctor. [*To DICKIE.*] Will you treat me?

DICKIE: I'll do anything I can for you.

MRS. FERGUSSON: But it must be really a professional visit. You know, I want to pay.

PENELOPE: Oh, nonsense, Dickie couldn't dream of accepting money from one of my friends.

MRS. FERGUSON: No, I've got the strictest principles on that point. I think it's too bad of people to want a doctor to treat them for nothing. I really insist on paying the usual fee.

DICKIE: Oh, well, we'll discuss that later.

PENELOPE: I'll leave you alone, shall I?

MRS. FERGUSON: Do you mind, dear? It makes me a little uncomfortable to discuss my symptoms before a third party.

PENELOPE: Of course.

MRS. FERGUSON: We shall only be five minutes.

PENELOPE: I warn you that Dickie's medicines are perfectly beastly.

[She goes out.]

DICKIE: I'm sorry you're seedy. You were all right yesterday.

MRS. FERGUSON: *[Laughing.]* I've never been better in my life, thank you. *[Dickie is rather taken aback.]* That's the advantage of you being a doctor. When I want to see you alone I can do it under your wife's very nose. Don't you think it was rather ingenious?

DICKIE: *[Dryly.]* Very. *[She gives a little laugh. She gets up and steps cautiously to the door, and suddenly flings it open.]* What on earth are you doing?

MRS. FERGUSON: I wanted to see if Penelope was listening.

DICKIE: *[Rather sharply.]* Of course she wasn't listening. That's about the last thing she'd do.

MRS. FERGUSON: Oh, my dear, don't get in a temper about it. Lots of women do listen, you know.

DICKIE: Do they? I haven't had the pleasure of meeting them.

MRS. FERGUSON: Fiddle.

DICKIE: Then will you tell me in what way I can be of use to you?

MRS. FERGUSON: [*Good-humouredly.*] Certainly not, if you ask me as crossly as that. You may kiss my hand. [*He does so.*] That's right. Still cross?

DICKIE: No.

MRS. FERGUSON: Do you love me as much as ever?

DICKIE: Yes.

MRS. FERGUSON: You wouldn't say no if you didn't, would you?

DICKIE: No.

MRS. FERGUSON: Brutel

DICKIE: [*Rather impatiently.*] I say, what on earth have you come for?

MRS. FERGUSON: You *are* nice to me to-day.

DICKIE: Well, when I left you yesterday we fixed up everything. I gave you your ticket, and I wrote down the time the train started.

MRS. FERGUSON: Well, for one thing I wanted to see Penelope.

DICKIE: Why?

MRS. FERGUSON: It amuses me to see her simplicity. I get a lot of pleasure in looking at her and thinking how little she suspects what is going on under her very nose. She's the most trusting person I ever met in my life.

DICKIE: If you want to know anything, it makes me feel devilish uncomfortable.

MRS. FERGUSON: My poor, dear boy, what *are* you talking about?

DICKIE: It wouldn't be so bad if we had to take any pre-

cautions. But she trusts us absolutely. Why, she's always throwing us together. It never enters her head that there can be the least reason for suspicion. It's like knocking a man down who can't defend himself.

MRS. FERGUSON: I suppose that means that you no longer love me?

DICKIE: Of course I love you. Good heavens, I've told you so till I'm blue in the face.

MRS. FERGUSON: Oh, no, you no longer love me. Men only begin to have scruples when they stop caring for you. [DICKIE gives a sigh of resignation. This is not the first scene he has had to put up with.] I've sacrificed everything for your sake. And now you insult me. And when I think of my poor husband bravely serving his country in a foreign land! Oh, it's cruel, cruel!

DICKIE: But I've only said it made me feel low down to treat Penelope badly.

MRS. FERGUSON: You don't think of my feelings. You don't think how I feel. What about my husband?

DICKIE: Well, you see I don't happen to know your husband, and I do know my wife.

MRS. FERGUSON: Don't be so stupid. Of course you know your wife.

DICKIE: That's why I don't like behaving like an utter cad.

MRS. FERGUSON: If you really loved me you would think of nothing but me, nothing, nothing, nothing.

[She puts her handkerchief to her eyes.]

DICKIE: Oh, I say, don't cry.

MRS. FERGUSON: I shall cry. I've never been treated like this before. If you don't love me any more, why don't you say so?

DICKIE: Yes, I do love you. But . . .

MRS. FERGUSSON: But what?

DICKIE: [*Nervously.*] Well—er—I think it would be much better if we—put the trip to Paris off for a bit.

MRS. FERGUSSON: [*Gasping with anger.*] Oh! Oh! Oh!

DICKIE: Penelope's so blindly confident.

MRS. FERGUSSON: I'll never speak to you again. I wish I had never met you. Oh, how can you insult me like this! [*She begins to sob.*]

DICKIE: Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord! I say, don't cry. I didn't mean to be horrid. I'm awfully sorry.

[*He tries to take away her hands from her face.*]

MRS. FERGUSSON: Don't touch me. Don't come near me.

DICKIE: I'll do anything you like if you won't cry. I say, just think if Penelope came in. I was only thinking of the risk to you. Of course, there's nothing I'd like so much as a jaunt over the Channel.

MRS. FERGUSSON: Is that true?

DICKIE: Yes.

MRS. FERGUSSON: Do you really want me to come?

DICKIE: Of course I do, if you don't mind the risk.

MRS. FERGUSSON: [*With a smile.*] Oh, I'll make that all right.

DICKIE: Why, what are you going to do?

MRS. FERGUSSON: Wait a minute or two and you'll see.

[*She is perfectly composed again, and in high good-humour.*]

DICKIE: We might tell Penelope that we're ready.

MRS. FERGUSSON: Very well. [*As DICKIE goes to the door.*] Oh, I quite forgot. I've simply got a head like a sieve.

DICKIE: What's the matter?

MRS. FERGUSSON: Well, I almost forgot the very thing I came to see you about. And all through you making a scene.

DICKIE: Did I make a scene? I wasn't aware of it.

MRS. FERGUSSON: I want to ask you something. You won't be angry, will you?

DICKIE: I shouldn't think so.

MRS. FERGUSSON: Of course it's nothing very important really, but it's just a little awkward to ask.

DICKIE: Oh, nonsense. Of course I'll do anything I can.

MRS. FERGUSSON: Well, a friend of mine on the Stock Exchange gave me a splendid tip, and . . .

DICKIE: It hasn't come off. I know those splendid tips.

MRS. FERGUSSON: Oh, but it's bound to be all right, only there are some differences to pay. I don't quite understand what it all means, but Solly Abrahams . . .

DICKIE: [*Interrupting.*] Is that your friend on the Stock Exchange?

MRS. FERGUSSON: Yes, why?

DICKIE: Oh, nothing. Good old Scotch name, that's all.

MRS. FERGUSSON: Solly says I must send him a cheque for a hundred and eighty pounds.

[*DICKIE gives a slight start, and his face falls.*]

MRS. FERGUSSON: And it's just a little awkward for me to pay that just now. You see my income is always paid me half-yearly, and I really haven't got a hundred and eighty pounds in the bank. I never borrow—it's a thing I can't bear—and I felt the only person I could come to now was you.

DICKIE: I'm sure that's awfully nice of you, not to say flattering.

MRS. FERGUSSON: I knew you'd give it me at once, and, of course, I'll pay you back out of my profits.

DICKIE: Oh, that's very good of you. I'll see what I can do.

MRS. FERGUSSON: Would it be too much trouble if I asked

you to write out a cheque now? It'll be such a weight off my mind.

DICKIE: Of course. I'll be only too glad. By the way, what are the shares called?

[He sits down at his desk and writes a cheque.]

MRS. FERGUSON: Oh, it's a gold mine. It's called the Johannesburg and New Jerusalem.

DICKIE: The name inspires confidence.

[He gives her the cheque.]

MRS. FERGUSON: Thanks so much. It's awfully good of you. Now just write out a little prescription so as to have something to show Penelope.

DICKIE: You forget nothing.

[He writes.]

MRS. FERGUSON: And I must give you a fee.

DICKIE: Oh, I wouldn't bother about that.

MRS. FERGUSON: Oh yes, I insist. Besides, it makes it look so much more probable.

[She looks in her purse.]

MRS. FERGUSON: Oh, how stupid of me! I've only got a two-shilling bit in my purse. You don't happen to have a couple of sovereigns on you.

DICKIE: Oh, yes, I think I have. The only money I've earned to-day.

[He takes them out of his pocket and gives them to Mrs. FERGUSON. She puts them on the desk with a two-shilling piece.]

MRS. FERGUSON: Thank you. . . . There. That looks a most imposing fee. You must leave it on there for Penelope to see.

DICKIE: Shall I call her?

MRS. FERGUSON: I will. *[She goes to the door and calls.]*
Penelope, we've quite done.

DICKIE: [*Hearing voices upstairs.*] Hulloo, there's our Uncle Davenport.

MRS. FERGUSON: Oh, I met him in the park the other day. He made himself so pleasant. He asked me if I was a Fergusson of Glengary. I didn't know what he meant, but I said I was, and he seemed so pleased.

DICKIE: You'd better not let him know you were a Miss Jones or he'll have a fit.

MRS. FERGUSON: Oh, I shall tell him I'm a Jones of Llan-dudno. I think that sounds rather smart.

DICKIE: You have what one might politely describe as a remarkable power of invention.

MRS. FERGUSON: I don't know about that, but I am a womanly woman, and that's why men like me.

[PENELOPE and BARLOW come in.]

BARLOW: Ah, Mrs. Fergusson, this is a delightful surprise.

MRS. FERGUSON: You wicked, wicked man, I am told you're such a rake.

PENELOPE: Uncle Davenport?

BARLOW: [*Delighted.*] Ah, ah. Tales out of school, Mrs. Fergusson.

MRS. FERGUSON: If I'd known what a reputation you had I wouldn't have let you talk to me for half an hour in the park.

BARLOW: [*Bubbling over with delight.*] Oh, you mustn't listen to all you hear. A man who goes out as much as I do is sure to get talked about. Our world is so small and so censorious.

MRS. FERGUSON: Dr. O'Farrell has been writing a prescription for me. I haven't been very well lately.

BARLOW: Oh, I'm very sorry to hear that. You look the picture of health and extremely handsome.

MRS. FERGUSON: Oh, you horrid cruel thing! I wanted you to sympathise with me and tell me how ill I looked.

BARLOW: If you will allow me to call on you I can promise to sympathise with you, but I'm afraid I shall never be able to tell you that you look anything but charming.

MRS. FERGUSSON: That's too nice of you. You must come and see me the moment I get back from Paris.

[DICKIE gives a start.]

PENELOPE: Are you going to Paris?

MRS. FERGUSSON: I came on purpose to tell you. Really, I've got a head like a sieve. Poor Mrs. Mack has asked me if I would go as far as Paris with her. A most unfortunate thing has happened. Her maid's mother has suddenly died, and the poor thing naturally wants to go to the funeral. And so . . .

PENELOPE: Mrs. Mack has asked you to go in her maid's place?

MRS. FERGUSSON: Only for two days, of course. Now, I want to know, dear, tell me honestly, do you mind?

PENELOPE: IP

MRS. FERGUSSON: Some women are so funny. I thought you mightn't like the idea of my going with Dr. O'Farrell as far as Paris, and, of course, we shall be travelling back together.

PENELOPE: What nonsense! Of course, I'm only too glad. It'll be so nice for Dickie to have some one to travel with.

MRS. FERGUSSON: Then that settles it. I like to do everything above board, you know.

BARLOW: [*Seeing the guineas on the desk.*] I see you've been raking in the shekels, Dickie.

MRS. FERGUSSON: Oh, that's my fee. I insisted on paying a fee—I particularly want you to know that, Penelope—I'm so scrupulous about that sort of thing.

PENELOPE: Oh, but Dickie can't accept it. [*To DICKIE*] You are a grasping old thing!

DICKIE: I'm sure I didn't want the money.

PENELOPE: You really must take it back, Ada.

MRS. FERGUSON: [*Putting up a defensive hand.*] No, I couldn't really. It's one of my principles.

PENELOPE: I know your principles are excellent, but I really shouldn't like Dickie to accept a fee for seeing my greatest friend.

[*PENELOPE takes up the money and gives it to Mrs. FERGUSON.*]

MRS. FERGUSON: Oh, well, of course, if you take it like that, I don't know what to do.

PENELOPE: Put it in your purse and say no more about it.

MRS. FERGUSON: Oh, it's too good of you.

[*She puts it in her purse. DICKIE's face falls as he sees his own money disappearing.*]

MRS. FERGUSON: And now I must really fly. [*Holding out her hand to BARLOW.*] Good-bye. Don't forget to come and see me, but, remember, I shall expect to hear all about that little ballet-girl.

BARLOW: [*Delighted to be thought so gay.*] You mustn't ask me to be indiscreet.

MRS. FERGUSON: [*To PENELOPE.*] Good-bye, dear.

PENELOPE: I'll come to the door with you.

[*PENELOPE and Mrs. FERGUSON go out.*]

DICKIE: [*Going to the telephone.*] I don't believe you've ever known a ballet-girl in your life.

BARLOW: No, but it pleases women of our class to think one is hand and glove with persons of that profession.

DICKIE: Central 1234. If they only knew that nine ballet-girls out of ten go home every night to their children and a husband in the suburbs! I just want to ring up my broker. Is that you, Robertson? I say, d'you know anything about a mine called the Johannesburg and New Jerusalem? Rotten? I thought as much. That's all,

thank you. [*He puts on the receiver—to himself, acidly.*] A hundred and eighty pounds gone bang.

BARLOW: Look here, Dickie, now that you have a moment to spare you might give me a little professional advice. Of course, I shan't pay you.

DICKIE: Good Lord! I might as well be a hospital. I'm not even supported by voluntary contributions.

BARLOW: The fact is, I've noticed lately that I'm not so thin as I was.

DICKIE: It can't have required great perspicacity to notice that.

BARLOW: I'm not asking you for repartee, Dickie, but advice.

DICKIE: You don't want to bother about a figure at your time of life.

BARLOW: To tell you the truth, I have an inkling that I've made something of an impression on a very charming lady . . .

DICKIE: [*Interrupting*] Take my advice and marry her quickly before the impression wears off.

BARLOW: Strange as it may appear to you, she's a married woman.

DICKIE: Then don't hesitate—do a bolt.

BARLOW: What do you mean, Dickie?

DICKIE: My dear Uncle Davenport, I'm young enough to be your son; philandering with a married woman is the most exaggerated form of amusement that's ever been invented. Take care! That's all I say. Take care!

BARLOW: Why?

DICKIE: She'll bind you hand and foot, and put a halter round your neck and lead you about by it. She'll ask you ten times a day if you love her, and each time you get up to go away she'll make a scene to force you to stay longer. Each time you put on your hat she'll pin

you down to the exact hour of your next visit.

BARLOW: But all women do that. It only shows that they like you.

DICKIE: Yes, I suppose all women do that—except Pen. Pen never bothers. She never asks you if you love her. She never keeps you when you want to get away. She never insists on knowing all your movements. And when you leave her she never asks that fatal, fiendish question, at what time will you be back?

BARLOW: Well, my boy, if my wife were as indifferent to me as that, I should ask myself who the other feller was.

DICKIE: What the dickens do you mean by that?

BARLOW: My dear Dickie, it's woman's nature to be exacting. If she's in love with you she's always a nuisance, and a very charming nuisance too, to my mind. I like it.

DICKIE: You are not suggesting that Penelope . . .

BARLOW: Now, my dear boy, I didn't come to talk to you about Penelope, but about my own health.

DICKIE: [*Impatiently.*] Oh, you've got chronic adiposity. That's all that's the matter with you.

BARLOW: Good gracious me, that sounds very alarming. And what shall I do for it?

DICKIE: [*Savagely, very quickly.*] Give up wines, spirits and liqueurs, bread, butter, milk, cream, sugar, potatoes, carrots, cauliflowers, peas, turnips, rice, sago, tapioca, macaroni, jam, honey, and marmalade.

BARLOW: But that's not treatment, that's homicidel

DICKIE: [*Taking no notice.*] Put on a sweater and run round the park every morning before breakfast. Let's have a look at your liver.

BARLOW: But, my dear Dickie . . .

DICKIE: Lie down on that sofa. Now don't make a fuss about it. I'm not going to kill you. [BARLOW *lies down.*] Put your knees up.

BARLOW: [*As DICKIE feels his liver.*] She's a fine, dashing woman. There's no doubt about that.

DICKIE: Let yourself go quite loose. Who's a fine, dashing woman?

BARLOW: Mrs. Fergusson.

[*DICKIE starts. He gives BARLOW a look, and then walks away, open-mouthed.*]

BARLOW: Dickie, Dickie.

[*Much alarmed he gets off the sofa.*]

BARLOW: Is my liver very wrong?

DICKIE: [*Completely abstracted.*] It's in a beastly state. I thought it would be.

BARLOW: [*In tragic tones.*] Richard, tell me the worst at once.

DICKIE: [*Impatiently.*] Don't be such an old donkey. Your liver's as right as mine is. There's nothing the matter with you except that you do yourself too well, and don't take enough exercise.

BARLOW: [*With unction.*] I suppose one has to pay for being the most popular diner-out of one's time.

DICKIE: [*Looking at him sharply.*] Is it on Mrs. Fergusson that you've made something of an impression?

BARLOW: [*With great self-satisfaction.*] My dear fellow, I am the last man to give a woman away.

DICKIE: Ah!

BARLOW: Between ourselves, Dickie, do you think Mrs. Fergusson would find it peculiar if I asked her to lunch with me *à tête-à-tête* at the Carlton?

DICKIE: Peculiar! She'd jump at it.

BARLOW: Do you think her husband would mind?

DICKIE: Oh, her husband's all right. He keeps on bravely serving his country in a foreign land.

BARLOW: It shows that she has a nice nature, or she wouldn't

have come to ask Penelope if she minded your going to Paris together.

DICKIE: Yes, she has a charming nature.

BARLOW: Lucky dog, I wish I were going to Paris with her.

DICKIE: [*Fervently.*] I wish you were.

BARLOW: Ha, ha. Well, well, I must be running away. I'm dining out as usual. These good duchesses, they will not leave me alone. Good-bye.

[*He goes out. DICKIE walks up and down the room thinking. In a moment PENELOPE puts her head in.*

PENELOPE: I say, darling, oughtn't you to be packing?

DICKIE: Come in and let's smoke a cigarette together.

PENELOPE: All right.

[*She takes a cigarette, which he lights for her.*

PENELOPE: I hope you'll have a splendid time in Paris.

[*She sits down.*

DICKIE: You never sit on the arm of my chair as you used to.

PENELOPE: I'm horribly afraid I'm growing middle-aged. I've discovered how much more comfortable it is to have a chair of my own.

DICKIE: [*Trying to hide a slight embarrassment.*] Weren't you rather surprised when Mrs. Fergusson told you she was going to Paris to-night?

PENELOPE: Surprised?

[*PENELOPE gives a little gurgle, tries to stifle it but cannot, then, giving way, bursts into peal upon peal of laughter. DICKIE watches her with increasing astonishment.*

DICKIE: What on earth are you laughing at?

PENELOPE: [*Bubbling over.*] Darling, you must think me an old silly. Of course, I knew you were going together.

DICKIE: [*Thoroughly startled.*] I don't know what you're talking about.

PENELOPE: I have tried not to see anything, but you do make it so difficult.

DICKIE: [*Making up his mind to be very haughty.*] Will you have the goodness to explain yourself.

PENELOPE: My dear, of course I know all about it.

DICKIE: I entirely fail to gather your meaning. What do you know all about?

PENELOPE: About you and Ada, silly.

DICKIE: [*Very haughtily.*] Penelope, do you mean to say you suspect me of . . . ?

PENELOPE: [*With an affectionate smile.*] Darling!

DICKIE: [*Suddenly alarmed.*] What d'you know?

PENELOPE: Everything.

[*He gives a gasp and looks at PENELOPE anxiously.*]

PENELOPE: I've been so amused to watch you during the last two months.

DICKIE: Amused?

PENELOPE: Upon my word, it's been as good as a play.

DICKIE: [*Quite at a loss.*] Have you known all along?

PENELOPE: My dear, didn't you see that I did everything in the world to throw you together?

DICKIE: But I assure you there's not a word of truth in it.

PENELOPE: [*Good-humouredly.*] Come, come, Dickie!

DICKIE: But why haven't you said anything?

PENELOPE: I thought it would only embarrass you. I didn't mean to say anything to-day, but I couldn't help laughing when you asked me if I was surprised.

DICKIE: Aren't you angry?

PENELOPE: Angry? What about?

DICKIE: Aren't you jealous?

PENELOPE: Jealous? You must think me a little donkey.

DICKIE: You took it as a matter of course? It amused you?
It was as good as a play?

PENELOPE: Darling, we've been married for five years. It's absurd to think there could be anything between us after all that time.

DICKIE: Oh, is it? I wasn't aware of that fact.

PENELOPE: The whole thing seemed to me of no importance.
I was pleased to think you were happy.

DICKIE: [*Flying into a passion.*] Well, I think it's positively disgraceful, Penelope.

PENELOPE: Oh, my dear, don't exaggerate. It was a harmless peccadillo.

DICKIE: I'm not talking of my behaviour, but of yours.

PENELOPE: Mine?

DICKIE: Yes, scandalous I call it.

PENELOPE: [*Quite disappointed.*] And I thought it was so tactful.

DICKIE: Tactful be blowed. You must be entirely devoid of any sense of decency.

PENELOPE: My dear, I haven't done anything.

DICKIE: That's just it. You ought to have done something. You ought to have kicked up a row; you ought to have made scenes; you ought to have divorced me. But just to sit there and let it go on as if it were nothing at all! It's too monstrous.

PENELOPE: I'm awfully sorry. If I'd known you wanted me to make a scene of course I would have, but really it didn't seem worth making a fuss about.

DICKIE: I've never heard anything so callous, anything so cold-blooded, anything so cynical.

PENELOPE: You are difficult to please.

DICKIE: But don't you realise that I've treated you abominably.

PENELOPE: Oh, no, you've always been the best and most discreet of husbands.

DICKIE: No, I've been a bad husband. I'm man enough to acknowledge it. And I mean to turn over a new leaf, Penelope; I will give Ada up. I promise you never to see her again.

PENELOPE: Darling, why should you cause her needless pain? After all, she's an old friend of mine. I think the least I can expect is that you should treat her nicely.

DICKIE: D'you mean to say you want it to go on?

PENELOPE: It's an arrangement that suits us all three. It amuses you, Ada has some one to take her about, and I get a lot of new frocks.

DICKIE: Frocks?

PENELOPE: Yes, you see, I've been consoling my aching heart by replenishing my wardrobe.

DICKIE: So you're willing to sacrifice our whole happiness to your frocks. Oh, I've cherished a viper in my bosom. I may have acted like a perfect beast, but, hang it all, I do know what's right and wrong. I have a moral sense.

PENELOPE: It seems to have displaced your sense of humour.

DICKIE: Do you know that all these weeks I've been tortured with remorse? I've told myself every day that I was treating you shamefully, I've not had a moment's happiness. I've lived on a perfect rack.

PENELOPE: It doesn't seem to have had any serious effect on your health.

DICKIE: And here have you been laughing up your sleeve all the time. It can't go on.

PENELOPE: Upon my word, I don't see why not?

DICKIE: We've been mistaken in one another. I'm not the

man to stand such a position with indifference. And I've been mistaken in you, Penelope. I thought you cared for me.

PENELOPE: I dote upon you.

DICKIE: That's a jolly nice way of showing it.

PENELOPE: That's just what I thought it was.

DICKIE: You've outraged all my better nature.

PENELOPE: Then what do you propose to do?

DICKIE: I'm going to do the only possible thing. Separate.

PENELOPE: [*Hearing voices in the hall.*] Here are papa and mamma. They said they were coming back.

DICKIE: I hope they'll never find out what a wicked, cruel woman you are. It would send down their grey hairs in sorrow to the grave.

PENELOPE: But, my dear, they know all about it.

DICKIE: What! Is there any one who doesn't know?

PENELOPE: We didn't tell Uncle Davenport. He's such a man of the world, he has no sense of humour.

[*PEYTON comes in to announce the GOLIGHTLYS, then goes out.*]

PEYTON: Professor and Mrs. Golightly.

[*The GOLIGHTLYS come in.*]

PENELOPE: [*Kissing MRS. GOLIGHTLY.*] Well, mother . . . Papa, Dickie wants to separate from me because I won't divorce him.

GOLIGHTLY: That doesn't sound very logical.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: What has happened?

PENELOPE: Nothing's happened. I can't make out why Dickie's so cross.

DICKIE: [*Indignantly.*] Nothing!

PENELOPE: I didn't mean to say anything about it, but Dickie found out that we knew all about his little love affair.

GOLIGHTLY: My dear, how tactless of you! A man likes to keep those things from his wife.

DICKIE: And d'you know the attitude Penelope takes up?

GOLIGHTLY: She hasn't been making a scene?

DICKIE: That's just it. Any woman of feeling would make a scene. There must be something radically wrong about her, or she would have wept and stamped and torn her hair.

GOLIGHTLY: [*Mildly.*] Oh, my dear boy, don't you exaggerate the enormity of your offence?

DICKIE: There are no excuses for me.

GOLIGHTLY: It was a mere trifle. It would show a lamentable want of humour in Penelope if she took it seriously.

DICKIE: D'you mean to say you agree with her?

GOLIGHTLY: My dear fellow, we're in the twentieth century.

DICKIE: Oh! Mrs. Golightly, you spend your time in converting the heathen. Don't you think your own family needs some of your attention?

[PENELOPE, *unseen by DICKIE, makes a face at MRS. GOLIGHTLY to induce her to keep up the scene.*

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: A long acquaintance with savage races has led me to the conclusion that man is naturally a polygamous animal.

DICKIE: My brain reels.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: I confess I was relieved to hear it was a married woman. It seems to make it so much more respectable.

DICKIE: It appears to me I'm the only moral man here.

PENELOPE: Dickie, darling, I haven't been having an affair with the policeman.

DICKIE: I wish you had. I wouldn't have treated you like this.

PENELOPE: I thought of it, but I didn't like the colour of his moustache.

DICKIE: I know I'm to blame. I've behaved like a perfect brute.

PENELOPE: Oh, nonsense.

DICKIE: Don't contradict, Penelope. I'm thoroughly ashamed of myself.

GOLIGHTLY: Come, come!

DICKIE: I repeat, there are no excuses for me.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: Poor fellow, he seems quite cut up.

DICKIE: I haven't a leg to stand on, but, by Jove, I've got a moral sense, and I tell you all that I'm simply outraged. You're overthrowing the foundations of society. Whatever I've done, I've got more respect for the sanctity of the home and the decencies of family life than all of you put together.

[He flings towards the door, stops, and turns round to shake his fist at them.]

DICKIE: A moral sense. That's what I've got.

[He goes out, slamming the door behind him.]

PENELOPE: *[With a laugh.]* Poor darling.

GOLIGHTLY: What on earth made you blurt it all out?

PENELOPE: She came here to-day, and I saw that he was sick to death of her. . . . Mamma, you behaved like a heroine of romance.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: I shall never forgive myself for the dreadful things you've made me say.

PENELOPE: Oh, yes, you will, mother. Fast an extra day all through next Lent. It'll be equally good for your soul and for your figure.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: Penelope!

PENELOPE: *[To GOLIGHTLY.]* I suddenly felt the moment had come.

GOLIGHTLY: Take care.

[DICKIE bursts violently into the room.

DICKIE: I say, what are these two confounded women doing in the hall.

PENELOPE: What women? Oh, I know. . . . [She goes to the door.] Please come in. They're from Françoise. The Modiste. [The girls come in, laden with hat boxes.

PENELOPE: You told me I might get a hat or two to console myself for your trip to Paris.

GOLIGHTLY: Very nice of you, Dickie. That shows you haven't a selfish nature.

[PENELOPE makes another face at her mother.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: You've never given me a free hand to buy hats, Charles.

GOLIGHTLY: On the other hand, I've never taken little jaunts to Paris without you, my dear.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: Some women are so lucky in their husbands.

[Meanwhile the girls have been taking hats out, and PENELOPE puts one on. She is perfectly delighted.

PENELOPE: Oh, isn't this a dream? [Looking at the other.] Oh! oh! Did you ever see anything so lovely? Dickie, you are a dear. I'm so glad you're going to Paris.

DICKIE: [Furiously.] I'm not going to Paris.

PENELOPE: What!

DICKIE: Take all these hats away.

PENELOPE: But Mrs. Mack?

DICKIE: Mrs. Mack can go to the devil.

[He seizes the telephone.

DICKIE: Hulloo, hulloo. Gerrard 1234. Tell Mrs. Fergusson that Mrs. Mack has had a relapse, and will not be able to go to Paris to-night.

THE THIRD ACT

SCENE: PENELOPE's boudoir. *It is an attractive room, furnished with bright-coloured chintzes, and gay with autumn flowers and great bunches of leaves. There is a large looking-glass. It is a room to live in, and there are books and magazines scattered about. Photographs of DICKIE in every imaginable attitude.*

PENELOPE, *in a ravishing costume, is alone, standing in the middle of the room. She looks at herself in the glass and turns right round, smiling with satisfaction. She preens herself. Suddenly she sees something she does not quite like; she frowns a little, then she makes a face at herself, solemnly and elaborately curtsies, and gaily throws herself a kiss.*

PEYTON *comes in, followed by the GOLIGHTLYS.*

PEYTON: Professor and Mrs. Golightly.

PENELOPE: [*Stretching out her arms.*] Oh, my sainted mother!

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: [*Out of breath.*] I've never climbed up so many stairs in my life.

PENELOPE: I told Peyton to bring you up here so that no one should come and bother us. [*With a dramatic gesture.*] My noble father!

GOLIGHTLY: My chyld!

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: Don't be ridiculous, Pen.

PENELOPE: Sit down, mamma, and get your breath back, because I'm just going to take it away again.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: It sounds hardly worth while.

PENELOPE: Dickie adores me.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: Is that all?

PENELOPE: But it's the most surprising, exquisite, wonderful

thing in the world, and I'm in the seventh heaven of delight.

GOLIGHTLY: But has he told you so?

PENELOPE: Oh, no, we're not on speaking terms at present.

GOLIGHTLY: Ah, I suppose you express your mutual affection in dumb show.

PENELOPE: He went out immediately after you left last night, and didn't come home till past twelve. I heard him stop at my door, so I huddled myself under the bed-clothes and pretended to be fast asleep, but I just let my hand drop carelessly over one side of the bed. Then he gave a tiny little knock, and as I didn't answer he came in, and he crept up on tip-toe, and he looked at me as if—as if he'd like to eat me up.

GOLIGHTLY: Penelope, you're romancing. How on earth could you know that?

PENELOPE: [*Putting her finger at the back of her head.*] I saw him through the back of my head—there. And then he bent down and just touched my hand with his lips. [*Showing her hand to GOLIGHTLY.*] Look, that's where he kissed it—just on the knuckle.

GOLIGHTLY: [*Gravely looking at her hand.*] It seems to have left no mark.

PENELOPE: Don't be silly. And then he crept softly out again, and I had the first really good sleep I've had for a month. And this morning I had my breakfast in bed, and when I got up he'd gone out.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: You haven't seen him to-day at all?

PENELOPE: No, he didn't come in to luncheon.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: Well, Charles, I'm grateful that you never showed your passion for me by keeping systematically out of my way.

PENELOPE: But, my dear, it's so simple. Of course, he's in a dreadful temper. I've made him feel a perfect fool, and

he hates it. But, good heavens! after five years I know how to deal with him when I've hurt his pride. I'll just give him a chance of saving his face, and then we'll fall into one another's arms and be happy ever afterwards.

[GOLIGHTLY, *who has been sitting near a table, draws a sheet of paper towards him and begins meditatively to write.*

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: But, darling, don't waste the precious hours, do it at once.

PENELOPE: No, I'm wiser than that. I'm not going to do anything till Ada Fergusson is quite disposed of.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: Has anything been seen of her?

PENELOPE: No, but I expect her here every minute.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: [*With a gasp.*] Here?

PENELOPE: She rang up last night and spoke [*imitating a man's tones*] in a deep voice, like this, so that I shouldn't recognise her. She asked if Dickie was at home, and I said he wasn't. [*Imitating the man's voice again.*] Will you ask him to ring up Mrs. Mack as soon as he comes back? Oh! I said, I think he's been at Mrs. Mack's all the evening, and I rang off quickly. And this morning I just took the receiver off, and I think by now Ada must be in a pretty temper.

[*She catches sight of GOLIGHTLY and goes up to look at what he is writing.*

PENELOPE: [*Tapping the table sharply with her open hand.*] Two and two don't make five, father.

GOLIGHTLY: I never said they did, darling.

PENELOPE: Then why are you writing it down?

GOLIGHTLY: You seem to think they do, my dear; and I have the highest respect for your intelligence.

PENELOPE: Mamma, if you thought it absolutely necessary to provide a father for your offspring, I wish you had chosen one who wasn't quite so irritating.

[GOLIGHTLY does not answer, but quietly adds two and two together. PENELOPE watches him for a moment.]

PENELOPE: D'you think I'm a perfect fool, father?

GOLIGHTLY: Yes, my dear.

PENELOPE: Why?

GOLIGHTLY: You're preparing for Dickie once more an uninterrupted diet of strawberry ices.

[PENELOPE goes up to her father and sits down opposite to him. She takes the pencil out of his hand.]

PENELOPE: Put that down, father, and tell me what you're talking about.

GOLIGHTLY: [Joining his hands and leaning back in his chair.] How are you going to keep your husband's love now you have got it back?

PENELOPE: [With a nod and a smile.] I'm never going to bore him with demonstrations of affection. I'm never going to ask him if he loves me. And when he goes out I'm never going to inquire at what time he'll be back.

GOLIGHTLY: [Calmly.] And what will you do when the next pretty little grass-widow throws herself at his head?

PENELOPE: [Rather outraged at the mere thought.] I hope he'll duck and dodge her.

GOLIGHTLY: [With a deprecating shrug of the shoulders.] Your mother, from her unrivalled knowledge of heathen races, has told you that man is naturally a polygamous animal.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: I shall never forgive myself.

PENELOPE: Do you mean to say I'm to expect Dickie to have flirtations with half a dozen different women?

GOLIGHTLY: I only see one way to avoid it.

PENELOPE: And what is that?

GOLIGHTLY: Be half a dozen different women yourself.

PENELOPE: It sounds dreadfully exhausting.

GOLIGHTLY: Remember that man is by nature a hunter. But how the dickens can he pursue if you're always flinging yourself in his arms? Even the barndoor hen gives her lawful mate a run for his money.

[PENELOPE looks from her father to her mother. She gives a little sigh.]

PENELOPE: It was so easy for me to love, honour and obey him, and so delightful. It never struck me that I ought to keep watch over my feelings.

GOLIGHTLY: We all strive for happiness, but what would happiness be if it clung to us like a poor relation?

PENELOPE: [*Nodding her head.*] Strawberry ice for breakfast, strawberry ice for luncheon, and strawberry ice for tea.

GOLIGHTLY: Put a Rembrandt on your walls, and in a week you'll pass it without a glance.

PENELOPE: [*Putting out deprecating hands.*] Papa, don't batter me with metaphors.

GOLIGHTLY: [*With a smile.*] Well, you made your love too cheap, my dear. You should have let your husband beg for it, and you made it a drug in the market. Dole out your riches. Make yourself a fortress that must be freshly stormed each day. Let him never know that he has all your heart. He must think always that at the bottom of your soul there is a jewel of great price that is beyond his reach.

PENELOPE: Do you mean to say that I must be always on my guard?

GOLIGHTLY: A wise woman never lets her husband be quite, quite sure of her. The moment he is—[*with a shrug of the shoulders*—Cupid puts on a top-hat and becomes a churchwarden.

PENELOPE: [*Huskiy.*] D'you think it's worth all that?

GOLIGHTLY: That is a question only you can answer.

PENELOPE: I suppose you mean it depends on how much I

love Dickie. [*A pause. Tremulously.*] I love him with all my heart, and if I can keep his love everything is worth while. [*She rests her face on her hands, and looks straight in front of her. Her voice is filled with tears.*] But, oh, father, why can't we go back to the beginning when we loved one another without a thought of wisdom or prudence? That was the real love. Why couldn't it last?

GOLIGHTLY: [*Tenderly.*] Because you and Dickie are man and woman, my dear.

PENELOPE: [*With a flash of her old spirit.*] But my friends have husbands, and they don't philander with every pretty woman they meet.

GOLIGHTLY: Scylla and Charybdis. The price they pay is satiety. Would you rather have the placid indifference of nine couples out of ten, or at the cost of a little trouble and a little common sense keep Dickie loving you passionately to the end of his days?

PENELOPE: [*With a roguish twinkle.*] You and mamma show no signs of being bored to death with one another.

GOLIGHTLY: Your sainted mother has been systematically unfaithful to me for twenty years.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: Charles!

GOLIGHTLY: She has had an affair with the Additional Curates' Society, and an intrigue with the English Church Mission. She has flirted with Christian Science, made eyes at Homœopathy, and her relations with vegetarianism have left a distinct mark on her figure. How could I help adoring a woman so depraved?

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: [*Good-humouredly.*] It's monstrous of you to reproach me, Charles, when you have conducted for years a harem of algebraical symbols.

PENELOPE: [*Lifting up her hands in mock horror.*] And to think that I never knew how immoral my parents were!

GOLIGHTLY: [*Patting his wife's hand.*] I think we must be the lucky ones, dear. We've been married for twenty years.

PENELOPE: [*Interrupting.*] Make it a quarter of a century, father. I really can't pass for less than twenty-four.

GOLIGHTLY: [*To his wife.*] And we seem to have got on pretty well, don't we?

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: [*Affectionately.*] You've been very good to me, Charles, dear.

GOLIGHTLY: We've clomb the hill together. . . .

PENELOPE: Shl shl shl I cannot allow my parents to flirt in my presence. I never heard of such a thing.

GOLIGHTLY: We tender our apologies.

PENELOPE: [*Hearing a sound.*] Listen. There's Dickie. Father, quickly—what must I do to make him love me always?

GOLIGHTLY: In two words, lead him a devil of a life.

PENELOPE: [*Ruefully.*] If you only knew how I want to fly into his arms and forget the wretched past!

GOLIGHTLY: Don't, but tell him you're going for a motor trip.

PENELOPE: [*Her face falling.*] Supposing he lets me go?

GOLIGHTLY: My dear, a merciful providence has given you roguish eyes and a sharp tongue. Make use of them.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: Charles, I shall be thankful when you return to your mathematics. The morals of that hussy X are already so bad that you can't make *them* much worse.

PENELOPE: The fact is, papa, that as a guide for the young you have rather advanced views.

GOLIGHTLY: [*With a grotesque, dramatic flourish.*] Ungrateful child! And I, like the pelican, have offered you my very heart to dine on.

[*DICKIE comes in. He is a little embarrassed and uncomfortable.*]

DICKIE: May I come in?

PENELOPE: Yes, dol

DICKIE: [*Nodding to the GOLIGHTLYS.*] How d'you do?

GOLIGHTLY: [*To his wife.*] Are you ready?

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: [*Getting up.*] Yes.

DICKIE: I hope I'm not driving you away.

GOLIGHTLY: Oh no, we only came in for ten minutes to say good-bye to Penelope.

[*DICKIE, rather puzzled at this, gives PENELOPE a quick look.*]

DICKIE: Are you . . . ? [*He stops.*]

GOLIGHTLY: I hope you'll enjoy yourself, dear.

PENELOPE: Oh, I'm sure I shall.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: Good-bye, darling.

PENELOPE: [*Kissing her mother.*] Good-bye.

[*She goes to the bell and rings it.*]

GOLIGHTLY: We can find our way out. Don't bother about Peyton.

PENELOPE: I want to speak to her.

GOLIGHTLY: Oh, I see. [*Nodding to DICKIE.*] Good-bye.

[*The GOLIGHTLYS go out. PENELOPE with a slight smile, lies down on the sofa and takes up a magazine. She pays no attention to DICKIE. He gives her a sidelong glance and arranges his tie in the glass. PEYTON comes in.*]

PENELOPE: [*Looking up from her magazine.*] Oh, Peyton, you might pack up some things for me in that little flat portmanteau of the doctor's. Put my green charmeuse in.

PEYTON: Very well, ma'am.

PENELOPE: You can call a cab in half an hour.

PEYTON: Very well, ma'am.

[*Exit.*]

DICKIE: Are you going away?

PENELOPE: Oh, yes, didn't I tell you?

DICKIE: [*Stiffly.*] No.

PENELOPE: How stupid of me! You see, I was expecting you to spend two or three days in Paris with Ada, and I arranged to motor down to Cornwall with the Hendersons.

DICKIE: But I gave up the trip to Paris so as not to annoy you.

PENELOPE: [*Smiling.*] It wouldn't have annoyed me a bit, darling.

DICKIE: It ought to have annoyed you.

PENELOPE: In any case I'm afraid I can't throw the Hendersons over. They've made up a little *partie carrée* so that we can play bridge in the evenings.

[*DICKIE goes up to PEN and sits on the sofa beside her.*]

DICKIE: Look here, Pen, let's make it up.

PENELOPE: [*Quite pleasantly.*] But we haven't quarrelled, have we?

DICKIE: [*With a smile.*] I don't know whether I want to shake you or hug you.

PENELOPE: Well, if I were you, I'd do neither.

DICKIE: [*Taking her hands.*] Pen, I want to talk seriously to you.

PENELOPE: [*Releasing them, with a look at the clock.*] Have you time?

DICKIE: What on earth d'you mean?

PENELOPE: You generally start off for Mrs. Mack's about now.

[*DICKIE gets up and walks up and down the room.*]

DICKIE: [*Resolutely.*] Mrs. Mack's dead.

PENELOPE: [*Jumping off the sofa.*] Dead! When's the funeral?

DICKIE: The date hasn't been settled yet.

PENELOPE: Well, now you'll be able to send in your bill.

DICKIE: [*Nervously.*] Pen, Mrs. Mack never existed.

PENELOPE: [*With a smile.*] I never thought she did, darling.

DICKIE: What! [PENELOPE *giggles.*] D'you mean to say you knew all the time that I'd invented her?

PENELOPE: I thought it was very nice of you to make up a plausible excuse for being away so much.

DICKIE: Then, when you bought all those things because I was making such a pot of money, you were just pulling my leg.

PENELOPE: [*With a smile.*] Well . . .

[DICKIE suddenly bursts into a shout of laughter.]

DICKIE: I say, you have scored us off. Upon my soul, you are a wonderful little woman. I can't think how I ever saw anything in Ada Fergusson.

PENELOPE: Oh, but I think she's charming.

DICKIE: What nonsense! You know you don't. If you only knew the life she led me!

PENELOPE: I suppose she often asked you if you really loved her?

DICKIE: Ten times a day.

PENELOPE: And when you left her, did she want to know exactly at what time you'd come back?

DICKIE: How did you know?

PENELOPE: I guessed it.

DICKIE: [*Going towards her as if to take her in his arms.*] Oh, Pen, let's forget and forgive.

PENELOPE: [*Getting out of his way.*] There's nothing to forgive, darling.

DICKIE: [*Making a step towards her.*] I suppose you want me to eat the dust. . . . I have behaved like a perfect brute. I'm awfully sorry, and I'll never do it again.

PENELOPE: [*Eluding him as though by accident.*] I daresay the game isn't worth the candle.

DICKIE: [*Trying to intercept her.*] Don't speak of it.

PENELOPE: [*Keeping out of his reach.*] And I was under the impression you were having such a good time.

DICKIE: I was feeling awfully conscience-stricken.

PENELOPE: That's where women have such an advantage over men. Their conscience never strikes them till they've lost their figure and their complexion.

DICKIE: [*Stopping.*] I say, what are you running round the room for in that ridiculous fashion?

PENELOPE: I thought we were playing touch-last.

DICKIE: Don't be a little beast, Pen. You know you love me, and I simply dote upon you. . . . I can't do more than I have done.

PENELOPE: What d'you want me to do?

DICKIE: I want you to kiss and make friends.

PENELOPE: [*Quite good-naturedly.*] I think you're a little previous, aren't you?

DICKIE: I suppose you're thinking of Ada Fergusson.

PENELOPE: I confess she hadn't entirely slipped my mind.

DICKIE: Hang Ada Fergusson!

PENELOPE: I think that's rather drastic punishment. After all, she did nothing but succumb to your fatal fascination.

DICKIE: That's right, put all the blame on me. As if it were men who made the running on these occasions! I never want to see her again.

PENELOPE: How changeable you are.

DICKIE: [*Going towards her eagerly.*] I'm never going to change again. I've had my lesson, and I'm going to be good in future.

PENELOPE: [*Getting a chair between herself and him.*] Anyhow, don't you think you'd better be off with the old love before you get on with the new?

DICKIE: Yes, but you might help me.

PENELOPE: You don't want me by any chance to tell Ada Fergusson that you don't care for her any more?

DICKIE: It's a devilish awkward thing to say oneself.

PENELOPE: I can imagine that the best-tempered woman would take it a little amiss.

DICKIE: I say, can't you suggest something to help me out?

PENELOPE: [*With a shrug of the shoulders.*] My dear, since the days of Ariadne there's only been one satisfactory way of consoling a deserted maiden.

DICKIE: [*With a jump.*] Uncle Davenport!

PENELOPE: What about Uncle Davenport?

DICKIE: He told me yesterday he thought she was a devilish fine woman.

PENELOPE: Oh, no, Dickie, I'm not going to allow you to sacrifice my only uncle.

DICKIE: I'll just ring him up and tell him she's not gone to Paris.

PENELOPE: No, Dickie. No, Dickie. No, Dickie!

DICKIE: [*At the telephone.*] Mayfair 7521. I promise you he shall come to no harm. Before it gets serious we'll tell him that she's not a Jones of Llandudno, but a Jones of Notting Hill Gate.

PENELOPE: [*With a giggle.*] I don't think it's quite nice what you're doing.

DICKIE: I think it's horrid. I shall blame myself very much afterwards.

PENELOPE: With your moral sense too.

DICKIE: Hulloa, can I speak to Mr. Barlow? Hulloa, is that you, Uncle Davenport? No, I didn't go to Paris after all. [*With wink at PENELOPE.*] Mrs. Mack had a sudden relapse, and couldn't be moved. No, Mrs. Fergusson hasn't gone either.

[PRYTON comes in.

PEYTON: Mrs. Fergusson is in the drawing-room, ma'am.

DICKIE: [*Speaking down the telephone.*] What! Half a minute. Hold on.

PENELOPE: I've been expecting her all the afternoon. Ask her if she wouldn't mind coming up here.

PEYTON: Very well, ma'am. [*Exit.*]

DICKIE: I say, there's no getting out of it. [*At the telephone.*] Hulloo. Why don't you come round? Mrs. Fergusson is calling on Pen, and you can arrange about your luncheon party then. . . . All right. Good-bye. . . . I say, I'm going to bolt.

PENELOPE: You coward!

DICKIE: [*Pretending to be very dignified.*] I'm not a coward, Penelope. I shall be back in two minutes. But I'm thirsty, and I'm going to have a brandy and soda.

[*He bends down to kiss her, but she moves away.*]

DICKIE: I say, hang it all, you needn't grudge me one kiss.

PENELOPE: [*Smiling.*] Wait till you're off with the old love, my friend.

DICKIE: I think it's a bit thick that a man shouldn't be allowed to embrace the wife of his bosom.

PENELOPE: You shall afterwards, if you're good.

DICKIE: I say, she's just coming. What a blessing this room has two doors!

[*He goes out. PENELOPE gets up, looks at herself in the glass, arranges a stray lock of hair, and powders her nose. ADA FERGUSSON comes in.*]

PENELOPE: [*Kissing her effusively.*] Dearest . . . I hope you don't mind being dragged up here.

MRS. FERGUSSON: Of course not. I like this room. I always think it's just the place for a heart-to-heart talk.

PENELOPE: How nice you're looking!

MRS. FERGUSSON: D'you like my frock?

PENELOPE: I always think it suits you so well.

MRS. FERGUSSON: [*Acidly.*] It is the first time I have put it on.

PENELOPE: Oh, then I suppose I've seen one just like it on other people.

MRS. FERGUSSON: You'll think I'm coming here a great deal, dearest.

PENELOPE: You know that Dickie and I are always glad to see you.

MRS. FERGUSSON: Is Dr. O'Farrell at home? I wanted to ask him something about the medicine he prescribed for me yesterday.

PENELOPE: Now don't say you've come to see Dickie. I was hoping you'd come to see me.

MRS. FERGUSSON: I wanted to kill two birds with one stone.

PENELOPE: That is a feat of marksmanship which always gives one satisfaction.

MRS. FERGUSSON: I forget if you said that Dr. O'Farrell was at home.

PENELOPE: You know, I think you must be the only person who's know him ten minutes without calling him Dickie.

MRS. FERGUSSON: I should have no confidence in him as a doctor if I did.

PENELOPE: I never employ him myself. I always go to Dr. Rogers.

MRS. FERGUSSON: You look as if you had robust health, dearest.

PENELOPE: Oh, I just manage to trip along above ground to save funeral expenses.

MRS. FERGUSSON: Is Dr. O'Farrell quite well?

PENELOPE: Tired.

MRS. FERGUSSON: [*Wondering why.*] Oh?

[*A slight pause.*]

MRS. FERGUSON: I suppose you haven't the least idea when he'll be home?

PENELOPE: I didn't know he was out.

MRS. FERGUSON: Oh, I beg your pardon. I thought you said he was out.

PENELOPE: No.

MRS. FERGUSON: I must have misunderstood you.

PENELOPE: I think he's lying down. You see he was with poor Mrs. Mack till twelve o'clock last night.

MRS. FERGUSON: [*With a slight start.*] Was he?

PENELOPE: It's so bad that she should have had a relapse when she seemed to be going on so well.

MRS. FERGUSON: [*Puzzled, but trying not to show it.*] I was more distressed than I can say.

PENELOPE: And it must have been so inconvenient for you after you'd made all your arrangements for going to Paris.

MRS. FERGUSON: Oh, of course, I didn't think of my convenience at all.

PENELOPE: Dickie says the way you've nursed her is beyond all praise.

MRS. FERGUSON: I think in this life we ought to do what we can for one another. I only did my duty.

PENELOPE: So few of us do that.

MRS. FERGUSON: When I think of my husband bravely serving his country in a foreign land, I feel that I ought to do anything I can to help others.

[*PENELOPE meditatively winks to herself.*]

PENELOPE: Were you there at the end?

MRS. FERGUSON: [*Astounded.*] What end?

PENELOPE: You don't mean to say you don't know?

MRS. FERGUSON: Penelope, I haven't an idea what you're talking about.

PENELOPE: But Dickie was with Mrs. Mack all this morning.

MRS. FERGUSON: That's absurd.

PENELOPE: I wonder you weren't sent for.

MRS. FERGUSON: But . . .

[She is speechless with anger and amazement.]

PENELOPE: Then you really don't know?

MRS. FERGUSON: *[Desperately.]* I know nothing.

PENELOPE: My poor dear Ada. I'm distracted that I should have to give you this bitter, bitter blow. Mrs. Mack is—dead.

MRS. FERGUSON: Dead!

PENELOPE: She died in Dickie's arms, thanking him for all he'd done for her.

MRS. FERGUSON: Impossible!

PENELOPE: I don't wonder you say that. She was quite frisky a day or two ago. . . . Sit down, dear. You're quite upset. You were very fond of her, weren't you?

MRS. FERGUSON: Dead!

PENELOPE: Why don't you have a good cry? Can't you find your handkerchief? Take this. It's very sad, isn't it? And after all you'd done for her?

[Mrs. FERGUSON dabs her eyes with the handkerchief.]

MRS. FERGUSON: *[Forcing herself to be natural.]* It's a great blow.

PENELOPE: Oh, I know. I feel for you, dear. Dickie was devoted to her. He said he'd never had such a patient. *[Putting her handkerchief to her own eyes.]* She died, with a smile on her lips, mentioning her dead husband's name. Dickie was so moved, he couldn't eat any lunch, poor boy; and we're going to have a new landaulette.

[DICKIE comes in and stops at the door for a moment as he sees the two women apparently in tears.]

DICKIE: I say, what's up?

PENELOPE: [*With a sob.*] I've just broken the news to poor Ada.

DICKIE: What news?

PENELOPE: She didn't know that Mrs. Mack was—no more.

MRS. FERGUSON: [*Trying to conceal her rage and mystification.*]
I certainly didn't!

PENELOPE: You ought to have let her know, Dickie. She would have liked to be—in at the death.

DICKIE: I wanted to spare you.

MRS. FERGUSON: It's too kind of you.

PENELOPE: I knew that was it. Dickie has such a kind heart.

MRS. FERGUSON: [*With restrained anger.*] I have already noticed it.

PENELOPE: [*To her husband.*] And you were so fond of her, weren't you?

DICKIE: I looked upon her as a real friend.

PENELOPE: I've told Ada that she expired in your arms, darling.

DICKIE: With a smile on her lips.

PENELOPE: That's just what I said. Murmuring the name of her husband, who'd been dead for forty years. What did you say the name was, Dickie?

DICKIE: Walker, darling.

PENELOPE: Tell Ada more. She wants to hear the details.

DICKIE: She asked to be remembered to you. She sent her love to your husband.

PENELOPE: She seems to have thought of everything. You must go to the funeral, Dickie.

DICKIE: Yes; I should like to show her that sign of respect.

PENELOPE: [*To Mrs. FERGUSON.*] Wouldn't you like a glass of sherry, dearest? I can see you're quite upset.

MRS. FERGUSON: The—news has taken me by surprise.

PENELOPE: To tell you the truth, I expected it last night. But I quite understand your emotion.

MRS. FERGUSON: I'm so much obliged for your sympathy.

PENELOPE: I'm going to get you some sherry myself.

DICKIE: Oh, let me.

PENELOPE: No, stay with Ada, darling. You have such a way with you when one's in trouble.

DICKIE: [*Edging off.*] On an occasion like this a woman wants another woman with her.

PENELOPE: [*Preventing him from moving.*] No, you know just the right thing to say. I shall never forget how charming you were when our last cook gave notice.

[*She goes out.* Mrs. FERGUSON springs to her feet.

MRS. FERGUSON: Now!

DICKIE: Good heavens! You made me positively jump.

MRS. FERGUSON: What does all this mean?

DICKIE: It means that Mrs. Mack, like the rest of us, is mortal. The funeral takes place the day after to-morrow at Kensal Green. Friends kindly accept this the only intimation.

MRS. FERGUSON: How can Mrs. Mack be dead! You know just as well as I do that she never existed.

DICKIE: Upon my word, I'm beginning to be not quite certain. I've talked about her so much that she seems much more real than—than my bank balance, for instance. And I could write a beautiful article for the *Lancet* on the case.

MRS. FERGUSON: [*Furiously.*] Oh!

DICKIE: After all, she did have a rotten time of it, poor old lady. Operation after operation. Life wasn't worth living. She was bound to die. And I call it a jolly happy release.

MRS. FERGUSON: Where were you last night?

DICKIE: I was at Mrs. Mack's—no, of course, I wasn't. I'm so used to saying that that it slips out quite naturally. I'm awfully sorry.

MRS. FERGUSSON: How can you tell me such lies?

DICKIE: I don't know. I suppose it's growing into a habit.

MRS. FERGUSSON: I recommend you to keep them for Penelope.

DICKIE: I suppose you think, then, they don't matter?

MRS. FERGUSSON: Oh, she's your wife. That's quite another story.

DICKIE: I see.

MRS. FERGUSSON: What d'you mean by saying, I see?

DICKIE: It was the only reply I could think of at the moment.

MRS. FERGUSSON: I'm sure you meant something by it.

[PEYTON comes in with a tray on which are two wine glasses and a decanter. They keep silence till she has gone out.]

DICKIE: Have a glass of sherry, will you?

MRS. FERGUSSON: No.

DICKIE: Well, I think I will if you don't mind. [*He pours himself out a glass.*] I have an idea that sherry's coming into fashion again.

MRS. FERGUSSON: Have you?

DICKIE: I always think I have a knack of making myself pleasant under difficulties. [*He drinks a glass of sherry to give himself courage.*] Look here, I've got something to tell you that I'm afraid you won't very much like. I daresay you'll think me an awful brute, but I'm bound to say it. [*Mrs. FERGUSSON does not answer, and after a moment's pause he goes on.*] The fact is, I'm not built the proper way for intrigue. All these lies make me awfully uncomfortable. I don't like to think I'm treating Penelope badly. [*Another pause.*] I may as well tell you the whole truth bang out. I've discovered that I'm desperately in love with Penelope.

MRS. FERGUSSON: [*Calmly.*] And?

DICKIE: [*Rather surprised.*] And that's all.

MRS. FERGUSSON: And how do you imagine that interests me?

DICKIE: [*Quite embarrassed.*] I thought—er . . .

[*MRS. FERGUSSON goes into a peal of laughter. DICKIE, quite taken aback, looks at her with astonishment.*

MRS. FERGUSSON: You haven't been under the impression that I ever cared for you?

DICKIE: [*Trying to make it out.*] No, no. Of course a man's a conceited ass who thinks a woman's in love with him.

MRS. FERGUSSON: You amused me when I first met you, but you've long ceased to do that.

DICKIE: It's kind of you to say so.

MRS. FERGUSSON: It was convenient to have some one to do things for me. I'm a womanly woman and . . .

DICKIE: You don't know your way about.

MRS. FERGUSSON: For the last month you've bored me to extinction. I've done everything in my power to show you except say it right out.

DICKIE: I'm afraid I've been very dense.

MRS. FERGUSSON: Dreadfully dense.

DICKIE: But it was good of you to spare my feelings.

MRS. FERGUSSON: [*With an amiable smile.*] D'you think it would be rude if I described you in your own words as a conceited ass?

DICKIE: It might make our future acquaintance rather formal.

MRS. FERGUSSON: There will be no future acquaintance.

DICKIE: Then there's nothing more to be said.

[*MRS. FERGUSSON sweeps to the door. She stops.*

MRS. FERGUSSON: Does Penelope adore you as blindly as when first I met you?

DICKIE: I venture to think she's as much in love with me as I am with her.

MRS. FERGUSON: What have you done with the letters I wrote to you?

DICKIE: I did as we agreed. I burnt them at once.

MRS. FERGUSON: I didn't. I kept yours.

DICKIE: I shouldn't have thought they were interesting enough.

MRS. FERGUSON: I have an idea that Penelope would find them positively absorbing.

DICKIE: Why don't you send them to her?

MRS. FERGUSON: If you have no objection, I think I will.

DICKIE: They will tell her nothing that she doesn't know already.

MRS. FERGUSON: [*Coming back, startled.*] You don't mean to say you've told her?

DICKIE: Of course not.

MRS. FERGUSON: Well?

DICKIE: She's known it all along.

MRS. FERGUSON: Known what?

DICKIE: Everything. From the beginning.

MRS. FERGUSON: [*Terrified.*] How did she find out?

DICKIE: Heaven only knows.

MRS. FERGUSON: It's a trap! I might have known she wasn't such a fool as she seemed. She wants to divorce you, and she's used me. My husband will never stand that.

DICKIE: I can imagine that even the most affectionate husband would draw the line there.

MRS. FERGUSON: Oh, don't try and be funny now.

DICKIE: I wasn't. The funny part is yet to come.

MRS. FERGUSON: What?

DICKIE: Well, you needn't get into a state about it. Penelope's not going to do anything.

MRS. FERGUSSON. But then, why. . . ?

DICKIE: [*With a shrug of the shoulders.*] She doesn't care a hang.

MRS. FERGUSSON: I don't understand.

DICKIE: Don't you? It's very simple. It's a matter of no importance. She's glad that I've been amused. If she only knew how much amusement I've got out of it! She looks upon it in the light of a—of a change of air.

MRS. FERGUSSON: [*Furiously.*] Oh! Oh! Oh! A fortnight's golf at the seaside, I suppose.

DICKIE: Something like that.

MRS. FERGUSSON: I'd sooner she divorced you.

DICKIE: Thanks, I wouldn't.

MRS. FERGUSSON: Oh, what a humiliation! I've been just a convenience because she had other fish to fry. How sordid it makes the whole thing! And I was yearning for romance. I would never have looked at you if I hadn't thought she doted on you.

DICKIE: I have an idea that affairs of this sort are only romantic when they happen to other people. When they happen to yourself—well, sordid's just the word.

MRS. FERGUSSON: [*Suddenly remembering.*] And Mrs. Mack?

DICKIE: She's known all about that too.

MRS. FERGUSSON: D'you mean that to-day when we . . . ?

DICKIE: Mingled your tears? I think hers were about as real as yours.

MRS. FERGUSSON: And she led me on to say one thing after another.

DICKIE: I think she's been pulling both our legs successfully.

MRS. FERGUSSON: How on earth am I going to meet her now?

DICKIE: She'll be all right. She'll be just as charming as ever.

MRS. FERGUSSON: You fool! Don't you see that if she's *charming to me* it's because she thinks she's prettier than I am, and cleverer than I am, and more fascinating than I am? She doesn't even despise me, she's indifferent to me. [*She goes to the glass and looks at herself. Furiously.*] A change of air.

[*The door opens slowly, and PENELOPE comes in. She has changed into motoring things. Mrs. FERGUSSON gives a sudden gasp as she sees her and turns her face away. For a moment PENELOPE stands still, looking at them reflectively. DICKIE aimlessly arranges things on a table.*

PENELOPE: [*With a faint smile.*] I'm not disturbing you, am I?

DICKIE: Et . . .

PENELOPE: Yes?

DICKIE: Nothing.

[*Suddenly, with a sob, Mrs. FERGUSSON sinks into a chair, and hiding her face bursts into tears. PENELOPE gives her a look of surprise and goes swiftly up to her. She leans over her, with her hand on Mrs. FERGUSSON's shoulder.*

PENELOPE: [*Almost tenderly.*] What? Real tears?

MRS. FERGUSSON: [*In a broken voice.*] I feel so ridiculous.

PENELOPE: [*With a little smile, as if she were talking to a child.*] Don't. Don't cry.

MRS. FERGUSSON: I look such a perfect fool.

PENELOPE: It's so tiresome of our little sins to look foolish when they're found out, instead of wicked.

MRS. FERGUSSON: I shall never respect myself again.

PENELOPE: Dry your tears, dear. Uncle Davenport has just come, and he wants to know if it's respectable to ask you to lunch with him alone.

MRS. FERGUSSON: [*With a suspicion of her old manner.*] He's so sympathetic. I'd like to have a heart-to-heart talk with him.

PENELOPE: You'll find the Carlton a most suitable place.

MRS. FERGUSSON: Are my eyes red?

PENELOPE: Not a bit. I'll get you some powder.

[*She takes the powder-box off a table, and MRS. FERGUSSON meditatively powders her nose.*]

MRS. FERGUSSON: I like him. He talks of all the duchesses by their Christian names.

[*PEYTON announces BARLOW and goes out.*]

PEYTON: Mr. Davenport Barlow.

[*As he comes in, MRS. FERGUSSON finally and entirely regains her usual manner.*]

PENELOPE: [*Kissing her uncle.*] How d'you do?

BARLOW: [*Advancing gallantly to MRS. FERGUSSON.*] This is a pleasing surprise. I was under the impression you were in Paris.

MRS. FERGUSSON: No, poor Mrs. Mack was suddenly taken much worse.

BARLOW: It is my gain.

MRS. FERGUSSON: It's too nice of you to say so, but I'm leaving London at once all the same.

BARLOW: But this is very sudden. What shall we do without you?

MRS. FERGUSSON: You must blame Dr. O'Farrell.

DICKIE: [*Astonished.*] Me?

MRS. FERGUSSON: He tells me that now I'm quite strong enough for a foreign climate, and, of course, nothing will induce me to remain an hour away from my husband if I'm not obliged to.

BARLOW: But I thought he was bravely fighting for his country.

MRS. FERGUSON: Well, you see, there doesn't happen to be any fighting for him to do just now, and he's taken a very nice house at Malta. And I shall start to-morrow.

BARLOW: This is more distressing than I can say. And are you going straight through?

MRS. FERGUSON: No, I shall stop a day or two in Paris on my way.

BARLOW: How very singular! I had made all arrangements to go to Paris to-morrow myself.

MRS. FERGUSON: Then would you mind looking after me on the journey? You see, I'm a womanly woman, and I'm quite helpless in the train by myself.

BARLOW: I should look upon it as a privilege. And perhaps we might go to one or two plays while you're there.

MRS. FERGUSON: If you'll promise not to take me to anything risky.

BARLOW: Ha, ha, ha.

MRS. FERGUSON: [*To PENELOPE.*] Well, dear, I must say good-bye to you. I'm afraid we shan't meet again for some time.

PENELOPE: Good-bye.

[They kiss one another affectionately.]

MRS. FERGUSON: [*To DICKIE.*] Good-bye. If you hear of anything good on the Stock Exchange, you might let me know. I think I shall cut my loss on Johannesburg and New Jerusalems.

DICKIE: I would.

MRS. FERGUSON: [*To BARLOW.*] I have a cab downstairs. Can I give you a lift anywhere?

BARLOW: It would be very kind of you.

[With a nod to DICKIE she goes out.]

BARLOW: [*Shaking hands with PENELOPE.*] Charming creature. So dashing and a thorough gentlewoman.

PENELOPE: Now, mind, Uncle Davenport, no pranks.

BARLOW: My dear, I'm not only the soul of honour, but fifty-two. *[Exit.]*

PENELOPE: *[As he goes out.]* I suppose that does induce a platonic state of mind.

DICKIE: *[With a sigh of relief.]* Ouf! *[PENELOPE turns to a glass to arrange her hat. DICKIE watches her with a smile.]* Well?

PENELOPE: *[Pretending to be surprised.]* I beg your pardon?

DICKIE: You promised to kiss me.

PENELOPE: I didn't. I promised to allow myself to be kissed.

DICKIE: *[Taking her in his arms and kissing her.]* You little beast.

PENELOPE: Finished?

DICKIE: Not nearly.

PENELOPE: Then I'm afraid you must go on another time. I've got a taxi at the door, and it's costing twopence a minute.

DICKIE: *[Stepping back.]* What d'you want a taxi for?

PENELOPE: *[With a laugh.]* I thought that would chill your ardour.

DICKIE: You're not going on that beastly motor trip now?

PENELOPE: Why on earth not?

DICKIE: *[Half injured, half surprised.]* Pen!

PENELOPE: *[Looking at the watch on her wrist.]* Good gracious, I'm keeping them waiting.

DICKIE: *[Taking both her hands.]* Now don't tease me. Go and take those horrid motor things off, and let's have a comfortable little tea together. And tell Peyton you're not at home.

PENELOPE: I'm dreadfully sorry to disappoint you, but I'm afraid I can't break an engagement.

DICKIE: You're not serious?

PENELOPE: Abnormally.

DICKIE: But, Pen dear, everything's different now. Don't you know that I love you?

PENELOPE: It's very nice of you to say so.

DICKIE: Doesn't it mean anything to you?

PENELOPE: Not much.

DICKIE: [*Beginning to be rather perplexed.*] But, Pen dear, pull yourself together. I love you just as much as you love me.

PENELOPE: [*With a little smile.*] But what makes you think I love you?

DICKIE: [*Aghast.*] You—you don't mean to say that you don't care for me any more?

PENELOPE: [*Judicially.*] I—no longer feel that the world is coming to an end when you go out of the room.

DICKIE: What! . . . Why don't you say straight out that you can't bear the sight of me?

PENELOPE: Because it wouldn't be quite true. I like you very well.

DICKIE: Like me! I don't want you to like me. I want you to love me.

PENELOPE: I wish I could. It would save a lot of bother.

DICKIE: I don't understand. This is the most extraordinary thing I've ever heard in my life. I always thought you adored me.

PENELOPE: Why?

DICKIE: Because I adore you.

PENELOPE: Since when?

DICKIE: Always, always, always.

PENELOPE: Fancy.

DICKIE: Oh, I know I made a fool of myself. I shall never cease to regret it. D'you think I was happy? D'you think

I had a jolly time? Not much . . . I suppose it's that.
You can't forgive me?

PENELOPE: Nonsense. Of course I forgive you. It doesn't matter a bit.

DICKIE: [*With a gesture of desperation.*] The whole thing's Greek to me. I loved you always, Pen. I never ceased for a moment to love you.

PENELOPE: My dear, you need not protest so much. It doesn't very much interest me either way.

DICKIE: What a fool I was! I ought to have known that if you took it so calmly it could only be because you didn't care. If a woman doesn't make scenes it can only mean that she doesn't love you. . . . You used to love me?

PENELOPE: Yes.

DICKIE: How can you be so fickle? I never thought you'd treat me like this. [*PENELOPE looks about as if she'd lost something.*] What are you looking for?

PENELOPE: I fancied you'd lost your sense of humour. I was just seeing if I could find it.

DICKIE: How can I have a sense of humour when I'm suffering?

PENELOPE: [*starting at the word.*] Suffering?

DICKIE: The tortures of the damned. I want you. I want your love.

[*He does not see PENELOPE's face. An expression of remorse comes into it at the pain she is causing him. She outlines a gesture towards him, but quickly restrains herself.*]

PENELOPE: [*With a mocking laugh.*] Poor darling.

DICKIE: [*Furiously.*] Don't laugh at me.

PENELOPE: I wasn't. I was quite sorry for you.

DICKIE: D'you think I want your pity?

PENELOPE: I'm very unfortunate. I seem quite unable to please you. I think it's just as well that I'm going away for a week.

DICKIE: [*Starting up.*] No, you're not going away.

PENELOPE: [*Raising her eyebrows.*] What makes you think that?

DICKIE: Because I forbid you to.

PENELOPE: [*Smiling.*] And are you under the delusion that at your command I shall fall flat on my face?

DICKIE: I'm the master of this house, and I mean to make myself respected.

PENELOPE: My dear, since you pay the rent and the taxes it's quite right that you should rule this house with a rod of iron if you wish it. Personally, at the moment I only want to get out of it.

DICKIE: You're not going out of it.

PENELOPE: Do you propose to keep me here against my will?

DICKIE: Certainly, if needful.

PENELOPE: H'm.

[She gets up and goes to the door. He intercepts her, locks the door, and puts the key in his pocket.]

PENELOPE: Brute force.

DICKIE: I think it's about time I showed you I'm not going to be made a perfect fool of.

[PENELOPE shrugs her shoulders and sits down. Suddenly she chuckles.]

DICKIE: I don't see anything to laugh at.

PENELOPE: I do. It's so mediæval. And are you going to feed me on bread and water?

DICKIE: [*Angrily.*] Ugh. [*He looks at her.*] Now, look here, Pen, be reasonable about it. Why the deuce d'you want to go for this stupid trip?

PENELOPE: I refuse to discuss the matter till you've opened the door.

DICKIE: It's not the time of year for a motor trip. [*Pause.*

PENELOPE *looks straight in front of her, taking no notice of what he says.*] It'll rain cats and dogs, and you'll catch a beastly cold. You'll probably get pneumonia. [*Pause.*] I'm feeling awfully run down, and I shouldn't wonder if I were sickening for something myself. [*PENELOPE smothers a giggle and continues to stare into vacancy. DICKIE breaks out passionately.*] But don't you see that if I'm preventing you from going, it's because I can't bear to let you out of my sight? I want you. I want you always by me. I want you to love me. . . . Oh, if you only knew how much I love you, you wouldn't be so heartless.

PENELOPE: [*Turning to him and speaking quite calmly.*] But surely, if you cared for me, you wouldn't try to deprive me of a little enjoyment. You'd be willing to sacrifice yourself sometimes. You'd have a certain regard for my wishes. You wouldn't put every absurd obstacle in the way when the chance offers for me to have some amusement.

[*DICKIE looks at her for a moment then turns away and walks up and down, with downcast head. He takes the key out of his pocket and silently puts it on the table beside her.*

PENELOPE: What does that mean?

DICKIE: [*In a broken voice.*] You're quite right. I've simply been beastly selfish. I was only thinking of myself. I dare say I bore you. Perhaps you'll like me better when you've been away for a few days.

[*PENELOPE is so moved that she can hardly keep up her acting any longer. She struggles with herself, and in a moment masters the desire to throw herself in his arms.*

PENELOPE: Since you locked the door, perhaps you'll be good enough to unlock it.

[Without a word he takes the key and goes to the door. He unlocks it.]

PENELOPE: Am I to understand that you offer no objection to my trip?

DICKIE: If it'll give you pleasure to go, I shall be pleased to think you're happy. I only want you to be happy.

PENELOPE: Would you rather I stayed?

DICKIE: No.

[PENELOPE gives a slight start. This is not at all what she wants.]

PENELOPE: Oh!

DICKIE: I don't know what I shall do without you. I feel as if I were only now getting to know you. It's as though—oh, I don't know how to express it.

PENELOPE: But you've just said you would rather I went.

DICKIE: I don't want to think of myself any more. I want to think only of you. It makes me so happy to think of you, Pen. I want to sacrifice myself.

PENELOPE: *[Relieved.]* Will you go to my room and see if my bag has been taken down?

[He goes out for a moment. She remains with an ecstatic look on her face. He comes back.]

DICKIE: Yes. Peyton's taken it.

PENELOPE: Then—*[she gives him a look from beneath her eyelashes]*—ring and tell her to bring it up again.

DICKIE: *[Hardly able to believe his good fortune.]* Pen!

PENELOPE: Are you pleased?

DICKIE: Oh, you're much too good to me. I can't tell you how grateful I am. Oh, Pen, if you only knew how much I adore you!

[He falls on his knees and passionately kisses her hands. She can hardly restrain herself from lifting him up and flinging her arms round his neck.]

DICKIE: Is there any chance for me at all? D'you think you'll ever love me as you used to?

PENELOPE: How can I tell?

DICKIE: Oh, why can't we go back to the beginning? D'you remember how we loved one another then? You used to come down with me every day when I went out, and when I came back you always ran down to kiss me. And d'you remember how you used to sit on my chair in the morning while I smoked my pipe and we read the paper together?

PENELOPE: [*Concealing a smile.*] How you must have hated it!

DICKIE: Hate it? I've never been so happy in my life.

PENELOPE: At all events I hope we shall always continue to be good friends.

DICKIE: [*Starting up.*] Friends! What's the good of offering me your friendship when I'm starving for your love? How can you make me so unhappy?

PENELOPE: [*Smiling indulgently.*] But I'm not going to make you unhappy. I hope I shall always be very pleasant and agreeable.

DICKIE: What d'you think I care for that? Pen, promise that you'll try to love me?

PENELOPE: [*With a smile.*] Yes, I'll try if you like.

DICKIE: I'll make you love me. I'll never rest till I'm sure of your love.

PENELOPE: And when you are sure of it I suppose you won't care twopence for me any more?

DICKIE: Try me! Try me! [*He kisses her hands again. He does not see her face. She smiles and shakes her head.*] I never knew that you were so adorable. It fills me with rapture merely to kiss your hands.

[PENELOPE gives a little laugh and releases herself.]

PENELOPE: Now I must just go to the Hendersons and tell them I can't come motoring.

DICKIE: Can't you telephone? I don't want to let you out of my sight.

PENELOPE: They're not on the telephone. It'll be more convenient for me to go.

DICKIE: Very well. If you must, I suppose you must. [*She smiles and goes to the door. When she reaches it he stops her.*] Oh, Pen!

PENELOPE: Yes.

DICKIE: At what time will you be back?

[*Recognising the phrase, she gives a gesture of amusement, quickly kisses her hand to him, and slips out of the door.*]

THE END.

SMITH

A COMEDY
in Three Acts

CHARACTERS

THOMAS FREEMAN

HERBERT DALLAS-BAKER, K.C.

ALGERNON PEPPERCORN

FLETCHER

MRS. DALLAS-BAKER

EMILY CHAPMAN

MRS. OTTO ROSENBERG

SMITH

TIME: 1909.

S M I T H

THE FIRST ACT

THE SCENE represents MRS. DALLAS-BAKER's drawing-room at Crediton Court, Kensington. There are windows at the back looking on to the street. On the right is a door leading from the hall; on the left a door leading into the dining-room. The furniture is in excellent taste of a commonplace sort. On the walls are autotypes after old Italian masters. There is good china in the cabinets. The chairs are covered with very pretty chintz. It is the kind of drawing-room which every woman of the upper middle class has in London. It is agreeable to the eye, unoriginal, artistic and inexpensive.

At a bridge-table are playing MRS. DALLAS-BAKER, EMILY CHAPMAN, MRS. OTTO ROSENBERG, and ALGERNON PEPPERCORN. It is about five o'clock in the afternoon.

ROSE—MRS. DALLAS-BAKER—is a pretty, fair woman of thirty. Her manners are rather affected. She is smartly dressed. ALGY PEPPERCORN is two or three years younger, clean-shaven and groomed with the greatest care; he looks as if he had just stepped out of a fashion-plate. He never sits down without pulling up his trousers so that they should not bag at the knee, and he always makes sure that he is not going to crumple the tails of his coat. MRS. OTTO ROSENBERG is a pretty, rosy-cheeked young woman, with golden hair elaborately arranged. Her clothes are obviously expensive. EMILY CHAPMAN is a woman of thirty-two, older than the others, who are her contemporaries, both in manner and appearance. She is dark, rather baggard, and with a worn look which she tries to conceal by making up her eyes and reddening her cheeks. She also is expensively dressed.

When the curtain rises the hand is half played. EMILY CHAPMAN is playing the two hands. ALGY is dummy. Two tricks are played in silence.

MRS. OTTO: How did you know I had that queen?

EMILY: [*Dryly.*] I'd taken the precaution to look over your hand at the beginning of the game.

ROSE: [*Irritably to MRS. OTTO.*] Why on earth you led that I cannot understand.

EMILY: D'you want to go on?

ROSE: You don't think you're going to get the rest?

EMILY: You haven't got a look in.

ROSE: We'll play them out.

EMILY: [*Shrugging her shoulders.*] You're only wasting time.

MRS. OTTO: I always like to play the hand right out. One never knows what's going to happen.

EMILY: That depends on how one plays.

ROSE: [*Throwing down her cards.*] You can have them. But if you hadn't finessed your ten we should have got another.

EMILY: But, good heavens, I could tell that she'd got the knave.

ROSE: [*Rather vexed.*] I don't see how.

EMILY: Because I happen to know bridge.

ALGY: You're a perfect terror. I must say I prefer to be your partner than your adversary.

EMILY: You must expect me to play pretty well. After all, it's my only means of livelihood. [*ROSE gives a little bitter laugh.*] I said that because I knew it was on the tip of your tongue, Rose dear.

MRS. OTTO: What do they score that time?

EMILY: Twenty-four below and thirty above.

ROSE: We've saved the game at all events.

EMILY: [*Handing the cards to Mrs. OTTO.*] Shall I cut?

MRS. OTTO: Oh, thanks.

ALGY: I say, Rose, what about tea?

[*Mrs. OTTO deals.*

ROSE: If you'll ring the bell, Smith will bring it.

ALGY: All right. [*He goes to the bell and rings.*

ROSE: Nothing will save us but hearts or no trumps.

MRS. OTTO: I'm not going no-trumps on three knaves and a ten, if that's what you mean.

EMILY: At this stage of the rubber you should.

MRS. OTTO: [*Picking up her cards.*] Hearts.

ROSE: I hope you've got something, partner.

ALGY: Shall I play?

EMILY: Please.

[*He plays a card and ROSE puts down her hand. SMITH comes in. She is a tall handsome girl of twenty. She holds herself well. She walks with grace and dignity. She is fair. It is obvious that she has perfect health of mind and body. Her manners are collected and reserved. She is dressed in black, with the apron and cap of a smart parlourmaid.*

ROSE: [*Getting up.*] Bring the tea, Smith.

SMITH: Very good, ma'am.

[*SMITH unfolds an occasional table and puts a cloth upon it.*

ROSE: Have you got Mr. Freeman's room ready?

SMITH: Yes, ma'am. [*She goes out.*

MRS. OTTO: Who on earth is Mr. Freeman?

ROSE: Tom.

[*EMILY looks up quickly, catches ROSE's eye, and looks away.*

MRS. OTTO: Your brother?

ROSE: [*Looking at EMILY with a smile.*] Yes, he's coming back to-day.

MRS. OTTO: Aren't you awfully excited?

ROSE: Do you think I look it?

EMILY: You can't expect to play bridge if you talk all the time.

ALGY: Thank goodness, here's tea.

[SMITH comes in with a tray on which are tea things. She goes out, comes in again with cakes, bread and butter, and scones, and goes out once more.]

ROSE: [Going back to the table.] I'm afraid I gave you a rotten hand.

MRS. OTTO: I hadn't a chance.

EMILY: All the rest are mine. [She puts down her hand.]

ALGY: That's game and rubber.

ROSE: You really have extraordinary luck, Emily.

EMILY: [Adding up the score.] There's nothing in it. Twenty-two shillings.

MRS. OTTO: I haven't started to add yet.

ROSE: [Who has been adding.] Twenty-two shillings.

MRS. OTTO: We'd better settle up, hadn't we?

ROSE: We can go on after tea.

MRS. OTTO: I thought you'd want to get rid of us.

ROSE: Why?

MRS. OTTO: At what time d'you expect your brother?

ROSE: I forget. He did wire. At what time was it, Algy?

[ALGY gets up and fetches a telegram that is on a desk.]

ALGY: His train gets in at Waterloo at 4.50.

MRS. OTTO: But aren't you going to meet him?

ROSE: [With a short laugh.] Good heavens, no. Why on earth should I stand about a draughty station for half an hour?

MRS. OTTO: But you haven't seen him for ten years.

ROSE: Eight, to be precise.

MRS. OTTO: When Otto goes over to Paris for a week on business I always meet him when he comes back.

ALGY: Doesn't it bore you?

MRS. OTTO: Yes, but Otto seems to think I ought to.

EMILY: Germans are so sentimental.

MRS. OTTO: I wish you wouldn't call him a German, Emily. He's been naturalised for ten years.

ROSE: I'm sure Tom would hate me to go to meet him just as much as I should hate going. I think you'll like him, Algy. He's really rather funny sometimes.

ALGY: I forget what he's been doing out there?

ROSE: Oh, all sorts of things. I know very little about him, you know. He's written to me once or twice a year, but I'm always so busy, I never seem to have time to answer his letters. I believe he's been farming in Rhodesia lately.

ALGY: That sounds a cheerful occupation.

EMILY: Haven't you a glass in here, Rose? I want to arrange my veil.

ROSE: No, Algy insisted on our taking it out. I forget why.

ALGY: I hate looking-glasses in a drawing-room. It's so beastly suburban.

EMILY: D'you mind if I go to your room, Rose? It harasses me to think that my hat is crooked.

ROSE: It's not at all, but go by all means. You know your way, don't you?

EMILY: Thank you.

[She goes out.]

ALGY: I think she's rather overdone it to-day.

ROSE: I hope to goodness she's not going to put any more on. Her eyes are too dreadful.

MRS. OTTO: It's a pity she makes up so much.

ROSE: She began it after her last engagement was broken off as an outward and visible sign of a broken heart.

ALGY: I feel the psychological moment is approaching when her hair will turn scarlet.

ROSE: I should think that'll come the next time her matrimonial schemes go wrong.

MRS. OTTO: She has been dreadfully unlucky, poor thing.

ROSE: You know she was engaged to Tom, don't you?

MRS. OTTO: No?

ROSE: That's why it's so funny they're meeting to-day. She gave me such a look when I mentioned his name. I wonder if she thinks he'll do after all?

MRS. OTTO: Did they break it off?

ROSE: Oh, when Tom was hammered on the Stock Exchange Emily very wisely sent him about his business.

ALGY: Modern love has a very delicate constitution. It can hardly be expected to stand a shock like that.

ROSE: She consoled herself by getting engaged to a man in the Army. And after they'd been engaged for two or three years he was killed somehow or other. Such a bore for her! I believe he was quite well off.

ALGY: And was it after that she began to rouge?

ROSE: Oh, no, she only powdered after that. She didn't rouge till after the Jew. You don't mind my calling him a Jew, darling, do you?

MRS. OTTO: Oh, no. You know, Otto doesn't mind being a Jew at all. He says it's such a passport to good society.

ROSE: The Jew was positively tragic. He was frightfully rich, and he used to give her lovely things. She was delighted. You see, she was at least twenty-seven then, and she was beginning to be rather nervous. And suddenly, just when they were going to be married he was made co-respondent in a divorce case, and when it was all over he went to Emily and said that as he'd ruined the woman and she'd lost her position, and heaven knows what, he felt it his duty to marry her.

ALGY: And Emily was left in the cart?

ROSE: She's thirty-two now if she's a day, and my impression is that she'd accept a chimney-sweep if he asked her.

MRS. OTTO: I suppose she's a great friend of yours, isn't she?

ROSE: Oh, yes, I'm devoted to her. . . . Of course we all know she hasn't a farthing.

ALGY: Personally I think she plays bridge a great deal too well.

ROSE: I only ask her if I can't get anybody else to make a fourth. *She always wins, and I find it quite hard enough to pay for my own frocks; I don't want to pay for hers.*

MRS. OTTO: She really dresses very nicely, doesn't she?

ROSE: I often wonder if it's only on bridge that she does it.

ALGY: At all events let us believe the worst about her.

[*EMILY comes back.*

EMILY: Well, have you been tearing my character to pieces?

ROSE: [*Impudently.*] We haven't left you a shred, darling.

EMILY: I thought not. I felt I must choose between my veil and my character when I left you.

ROSE: You wisely chose the more important. [*As the door opens.*] Ah, here comes my lord and master.

[*HERBERT DALLAS-BAKER comes in. He is a stout, bald man of forty-five, easy-going, rather pompous, commonplace, and very well satisfied with his position of King's Counsel.*

DALLAS-BAKER: How d'you do? [*He shakes hands with Mrs. OTTO and EMILY.*] Hulloa, Algy!

ALGY: Hulloa!

ROSE: You've just come in time for tea.

DALLAS-BAKER: There was nothing doing in chambers, so I thought I'd come back and see if there was any bridge going.

[ROSE gives him tea and he sits down.]

MRS. OTTO: You can take my place, I shall have to be going.

ROSE: Oh, nonsense. We'll cut out.

DALLAS-BAKER: [To ROSE.] I suppose your brother hasn't turned up yet?

ROSE: No, I daresay his train's late.

DALLAS-BAKER: [To MRS. OTTO.] It's rather funny, I've never seen him, you know. I didn't meet Rose till after he went out to the Cape.

ROSE: He's one of those restful people who take nothing seriously. He has no morals and no conscience.

MRS. OTTO: He sounds perfectly delightful.

ROSE: On the other hand, he has a very neat gift for repartee and a very keen sense of humour.

ALGY: Which is much more useful in a wicked world.

EMILY: He may have changed in eight years.

ROSE: Oh, I'm sure he hasn't. He'll be just the same flippant, careless, delicious creature he always was.

DALLAS-BAKER: And what have *you* been doing to-day Algy?

ALGY: Oh, we've had rather a busy day, haven't we, Rose?

ROSE: We have rather.

ALGY: I rolled up about eleven and took Rose to have a frock tried on.

ROSE: Algy's perfectly invaluable at a dressmaker's. He's so full of ideas.

ALGY: If I may say it without vanity, I do know a thing or two about frocks.

MRS. OTTO: [With a laugh.] I wonder what Otto would say if I took a young man to help me try on a new frock.

DALLAS-BAKER: [*With a glance at ROSE's dress.*] I suppose it depends on the result.

ROSE: I think Otto sounds rather suburban.

MRS. OTTO: He's not exactly suburban. He's Maida Vale.

ALGY: After that we came back here and lunched and we've played bridge ever since.

ROSE: I do think London's so tiring.

EMILY: If we want to have another rubber before dinner we ought not to waste any more time.

[They get up and come to the bridge-table.]

MRS. OTTO: I'm not going to play any more. I'm afraid I haven't time.

DALLAS-BAKER: Are you sure I'm not driving you away?

MRS. OTTO: Not a bit. I'll just wait a few minutes and see what hands you've got, and then I must fly.

EMILY: Let's cut for deal. *[They cut.]*

DALLAS-BAKER: You and I, Miss Chapman.

EMILY: Yes. *[They sit down and ROSE deals.]*

DALLAS-BAKER: Are you weak and weak?

EMILY: I am.

DALLAS-BAKER: So am I.

EMILY: You don't mind light no-trumpers, do you?

DALLAS-BAKER: No.

EMILY: It's the only way to make money.

ALGY: You put the fear of God into me, Miss Chapman.

ROSE: I say, it'll be an awful bore if Tom comes before we've finished the rubber.

ALGY: A merciful Providence is always good to card-players.

ROSE: Nothing will induce me to stop in the middle of a hand.

[Having finished dealing, she looks at her hand.]

ROSE: Hearts.

EMILY: Shall I play to hearts, partner?

DALLAS-BAKER: Please do.

[EMILY puts down a card. The door opens and SMITH comes in to announce THOMAS FREEMAN. He comes in immediately after her, tempestuously, with his hat and coat on and a rug over his arm. He is a well-set-up man of thirty-five, big, muscular and strong. He has a hearty, enthusiastic manner and a boyish laugh. He is dressed in loose tweeds, quite well-cut, but not smartly.]

SMITH: Mr. Freeman.

FREEMAN: Rose.

ROSE: Tactless creature! Why couldn't you wait till I was dummy?

FREEMAN: Rose.

ROSE: Why on earth d'you bring all your luggage in with you? [With a little laugh of vexation.] I do hate people who come into my drawing-room with hats and coats.

[FREEMAN, stopped in his rush towards her, stands quite still, looking at her in astonishment. SMITH comes forward.]

SMITH: Shall I take your coat, sir?

FREEMAN: [With a pleasant smile.] If you wouldn't mind.

[He takes it off and she disembarrasses him of his rug and his hat. She takes them away.]

ROSE: [Looking at dummy's hand, which ALGY has placed on the table.] Let me see what you've got first.

[FREEMAN with a smile goes to her, takes the cards out of her hand, turns her round, lifts her out of her chair, and kisses her.]

FREEMAN: Rose, I've not seen you for eight years.

ROSE: Don't be idiotic, Tom.

FREEMAN: Come, give me a kiss.

ROSE: [*To the others.*] I'm awfully sorry, I had no idea my brother was going to be so demonstrative.

EMILY: We'd better give the game up.

ROSE: I suppose you had a rotten hand. I had a particularly good one.

FREEMAN: [*Drawing her towards him.*] Don't talk so much, Rose. Give me a kiss.

ROSE: [*Smiling, but rather put out.*] You're like a bull in a china-shop.

[*She kisses him, and he, taking her in his arms, holds her to him.*]

FREEMAN: D'you know, I was frightened out of my wits. I was afraid you were ill when I didn't see you at the station.

ROSE: You didn't expect me to come and meet you, did you?

FREEMAN: Of course I did, you selfish little beast. [*With a gay laugh.*] But it doesn't matter. [*As she tries to get away from him.*] No, I'm not going to let you go. By George, I am so glad to see you again.

ROSE: You're making everybody feel very uncomfortable and *me* perfectly absurd.

FREEMAN: [*Releasing her, with a smile.*] I apologise.

ROSE: If I'd known he was going to behave in this way I'd have received him in strict privacy.

FREEMAN: [*Going up to ALGY with outstretched hand.*] I suppose you're my brother-in-law.

ALGY: I'm delighted to shake hands with you, but I haven't that honour.

ROSE: This is Herbert.

FREEMAN: [*Rather taken aback, and shaking hands with DALLAS-BAKER.*] Oh! You—you might have sent me a photograph.

DALLAS-BAKER: I find as one grows older the camera has no great attraction for one.

ROSE: And this is Emily Chapman. You remember her, don't you?

FREEMAN: [*Shaking hands cordially.*] By Jove, it is ripping to see you. You haven't changed a bit.

EMILY: It's nice of you to say so.

ROSE: And this is Cynthia. Don't you remember Cynthia Russell?

FREEMAN: [*Searching his memory.*] A flapper! Good gracious me, how old I'm growing.

MRS. OTTO: How d'you do—and good-bye. I really must be going away. . . . I think my husband used to know you when you were on the Stock Exchange.

FREEMAN: You don't mean to say you're married. What is his name?

MRS. OTTO: Otto Rosenberg.

FREEMAN: No, I don't think so. I used to know a fat old German Jew called Rosenberg, but he was old enough to be your father.

MRS. OTTO: [*Smiling.*] That is my husband.

FREEMAN: [*Taken aback.*] Oh! I beg your pardon, I'm so sorry.

MRS. OTTO: It doesn't matter at all. People do call him a fat old German Jew, but there's not a girl I know who wouldn't have been glad to marry him.

FREEMAN: As long as you're happy, that's the chief thing, isn't it?

ALGY: How's the son and heir?

MRS. OTTO: Oh, he was rather seedy this morning. I just saw him for two minutes before I went out.

FREEMAN: Have you got a baby? How old is he?

MRS. OTTO: Six weeks. [*Looking at the watch on her wrist.*]
Good heavens! I've only just got time to go back and dress for the Opera. Otto's so funny, he hates arriving late.

FREEMAN: Are you able to leave your baby so long?

MRS. OTTO: [*Surprised.*] He's got a nurse.

FREEMAN: But you look the very picture of health.

MRS. OTTO: What does he mean?

FREEMAN: Aren't you nursing him?

ROSE: [*Remonstrating.*] My dear Tom.

MRS. OTTO: My dear Mr. Freeman, you don't imagine I'm going to waste the next eight months of my life in that way. It's bad enough beforehand, but really there *are* limits.

FREEMAN: I beg your pardon. In Rhodesia we're rather primitive in our habits.

MRS. OTTO: [*With a laugh.*] Absurd creature! [*To ROSE.*]
Good-bye, dear, I've enjoyed my afternoon.

ROSE: Good-bye. It's so nice to have seen you. Give my love to Otto.

[*MRS. OTTO nods to the others and goes out.*]

ROSE: [*To FREEMAN laughingly.*] What on earth made you say that to Cynthia?

FREEMAN: I think women ought to nurse their babies if they're lucky enough to have them.

ROSE: You?

[*SMITH comes in and goes to FREEMAN.*]

SMITH: Would you give me the key of your box, sir? I've unpacked the dressing-case.

FREEMAN: [*Giving her the key.*] Thank you very much. [*SMITH goes out.*] It is splendid to have someone to do things for you when you've had to do everything for yourself for the Lord knows how long.

EMILY: Haven't you got a new parlourmaid, Rose?

ROSE: No, I've had her since last summer.

EMILY: I never noticed her before.

ROSE: Her father has a farm near the house we took for the long vacation. We used to get our eggs and butter there. She wanted a place, so I took her.

EMILY: Hadn't she ever been in service before?

ROSE: Oh, yes, she's been in some very good houses, but only in the country. She was very anxious to come to London.

DALLAS-BAKER: She's the best maid we've had for a long time.

ROSE: She's been rather a success. She works like a horse, and she's a very good needlewoman.

FREEMAN: She's a handsome woman.

ROSE: A parlourmaid isn't a handsome woman, Tom; she has a good appearance. That's really why I engaged her. Algy hates me to have ugly maids.

ALGY: [*To DALLAS-BAKER.*] You know that Rose and I have got a bet on about her?

DALLAS-BAKER: Have you?

ALGY: Half a dozen pairs of gloves.

ROSE: Suède gloves, and they're not to cost less than five-and-six a pair.

ALGY: Of course a girl like that is bound to get into trouble. We're both agreed that it's only a question of time before she produces a little Smith.

EMILY: [*Laughing.*] How absurd you are, Algy!

ALGY: We can't make up our minds if it's going to be the porter of the flats or the policeman.

ROSE: I put my money on the policeman because he wears a uniform and an air of romance.

ALGY: I back the porter because he's on the spot, and opportunity is the first aid of love.

DALLAS-BAKER: Why not the postman? He wears a uniform he calls seven times a day, and there's a dash about him that a policeman hasn't got.

ROSE: What do you think, Tom?

FREEMAN: [*Frigidly.*] If I suppose her father asked you to look after her when she came to London?

ROSE: My dear Tom, have you no sense of humour?

FREEMAN: I beg your pardon, I didn't understand that the prospect of a young girl having an illegitimate child was a matter for hilarity.

[*They look at one another in astonishment.*]

ALGY: [*Coming over to ROSE and taking her hand.*] My dear Rose, allow me to offer you my sincerest sympathy.

ROSE: [*Trying to laugh.*] I can't make him out. I think he must be playing an elaborate joke on us.

EMILY: [*Rising.*] I think I'm going to leave you to enjoy one another's society. I feel sure you want to fall on one another's necks and talk about long-deceased relatives.

ROSE: I'm sorry our bridge was interrupted.

EMILY: [*Holding out her hand to FREEMAN.*] Good-bye.

FREEMAN: [*Cordially taking both her hands.*] Good-bye. I'm so glad to have seen you again. I hope to see a lot of you while I'm here.

EMILY: I'm surprised you haven't forgotten me.

FREEMAN: What nonsense! I've often wondered what had become of you. It does one good to see old friends when one's been away so long as I have.

EMILY: Good-bye.

[*She goes to the door accompanied by DALLAS-BAKER, who takes her out.*]

FREEMAN: Nice girl. I'm sorry she hasn't married. I was hoping to find her with half a dozen children when I came back.

ROSE: Didn't it make you a little uncomfortable to see her again?

FREEMAN: [*Surprised.*] Why?

ROSE: You haven't forgotten that you were engaged to her?

FREEMAN: That's no reason why we shouldn't be friends now, is it? I was awfully cut up when she broke it off, but I know now that I was quite unfit to marry. I should have made her a very bad husband.

ROSE: After all, she only threw you over because you went broke.

FREEMAN: Well, I bear her no illwill for it. I dare say it was very natural.

ALGY: You appear to have a charming nature.

FREEMAN: By the way, who are *you*?

ALGY: [*Impudently.*] I? Nobody. Algy.

FREEMAN: That sufficiently explains itself.

ALGY: [*With a laugh.*] You have a pleasant way of putting things, haven't you?

FREEMAN: Now look here, I don't want to seem disagreeable, but you show no signs of making a move, and I haven't seen my sister for eight years. Don't you think it would be a good idea if you hooked it?

ROSE: [*Amused.*] Tom, you must behave yourself. You can't neglect the ordinary forms of good society.

FREEMAN: [*Calmly.*] Damn good society.

ALGY: It would be difficult after that to make my departure look quite natural, wouldn't it?

[DALLAS-BAKER comes in.

DALLAS-BAKER: You're going to stay to dinner, Algy, aren't you?

ALGY: Your brother-in-law seems to think he would like to enjoy the society of his family without . . . [*He hesitates for a word.*]

FREEMAN: [*With a grim smile.*] An outsider.

ROSE: Nonsense, of course you must stay as usual.

ALGY: I'll just go and telephone to mother and tell her to send my clothes along. I can change in your room, can't I?

DALLAS-BAKER: Certainly.

ALGY: [*To FREEMAN.*] I'm sorry to annoy, but Rose's cook is so much better than mother's.

DALLAS-BAKER: [*Rubbing his hands.*] You must be very glad to get home again.

FREEMAN: [*Enthusiastically.*] Glad! You don't know how often I've lain awake at night out there and longed for the green lanes and the jolly grey skies of England.

ALGY: Stop him, Rose, he's just going to call it a tight little island. [*Exit.*]

FREEMAN: [*Taking no notice.*] And when I landed I could have hugged everyone I saw, man, woman and child. I thought Southampton the most ripping place in the world. And in the train! My Lord, the green trees, and the great fat fields, and the little red-brick villas! And I kept on saying to myself, it's England, England!

ROSE: [*With an ironical smile.*] Moderate your transports, Tom. You're making yourself ridiculous.

FREEMAN: What do you think I care? And at Waterloo the porter asked me if I'd have a taxi. Not at any price, I said. Get me a growler. And when I got in and smelt its good old musty stink, I really felt I was in London.

DALLAS-BAKER: You'll find a lot of changes since you went away. Motor-cabs, motor-omnibuses, tubes. We've moved since you left us.

FREEMAN: [*Thoughtfully.*] I wonder.

DALLAS-BAKER: The progress of the last ten years has been perfectly phenomenal. You may take my word for it.

ROSE: You're getting prosy, Herbert.

DALLAS-BAKER: Am I? It's the greatest city the world has ever known. . . . I'll go and see what wine Smith has got out for dinner. *[He goes out.]*

FREEMAN: I'm sorry I was rather sniffy with your friend just now, but I did so want to be alone with you.

ROSE: You've succeeded in putting your foot in it very thoroughly since you arrived.

FREEMAN: Never mind, I dare say they'll all forgive me. *[He goes to ROSE, takes her by the shoulders, and makes her stand in front of him.]* Let me look at you.

ROSE: *[Trying to release herself.]* Don't be idiotic, Tom.

FREEMAN: Are you happy, dear?

ROSE: Of course I'm happy.

FREEMAN: I've been so anxious about you.

ROSE: Why?

FREEMAN: I knew nothing about your husband except that he was a good deal older than you.

ROSE: That's inevitable, isn't it, unless you want to scrub along on twopence a year? Men don't seem to earn enough to keep a wife decently till they're about forty.

FREEMAN: I'm so relieved that it's all right.

ROSE: What on earth have you been fussing about?

FREEMAN: *[Slipping his arm round her waist.]* I was afraid that you might be awfully disappointed at having no children.

ROSE: *[With a laugh.]* But, my dear Tom, we could have lots if we wanted to. If we haven't got any family it's because we take jolly good care not to.

FREEMAN. *[Releasing her, dryly.]* I was under the impression that a woman could suffer no greater misfortune than to have no children.

ROSE. *[With a laugh.]* You're a perfect fool, Tom. Herbert makes about two thousand a year and we have a very decent time on it. We go to St. Moritz and Paris and Marienbad, and we take a house in the country. And if

we're bored we can always stand ourselves a theatre and a little supper at the Carlton. But we couldn't do that if we had half a dozen children.

FREEMAN: I see. That never struck me.

ROSE: And besides, I want to enjoy myself. I'm not going to waste my youth in having babies. For six months Cynthia Rosenberg simply couldn't do anything. She led a dog's life.

FREEMAN: I should have thought it was a great happiness as well as a great privilege to have children.

ROSE: My dear Tom, I'm growing seriously uneasy. I'm dreadfully afraid you've become a prig.

[DALLAS-BAKER comes in.]

DALLAS-BAKER: I thought we'd kill the fatted calf to celebrate the prodigal's return.

ROSE: [*Smiling.*] That sounds like champagne.

DALLAS-BAKER: I've got just a little more Moët et Chandon, '98. I thought this would be an admirable opportunity to drink it.

ROSE: [*With a smile at FREEMAN.*] We couldn't give you Moët et Chandon if we had to provide for a pack of squalling brats, Tom.

FREEMAN: [*Good-humouredly.*] I'm afraid you'll be quite certain I'm a prig, but to tell you the truth I would just as soon drink beer.

[ALGY PEPPERCORN comes in.]

ALGY: My mother sends her love by the telephone and my clothes by a messenger-boy.

ROSE: She's a most domesticated parent.

[ALGY brings forward a chair and sits exactly in front of FREEMAN.]

FREEMAN: What are you doing that for?

ALGY: Just before you came Rose was assuring us that you had a pretty wit. Pray scintillate.

FREEMAN: [*Laughing.*] You're a foolish youth. If I was rude to you just now I beg your pardon.

ALGY: You *were* rude to me, but by begging my pardon you assume a pose of superiority which I resent.

FREEMAN: I'm afraid I don't understand what you're talking about.

ALGY: I beg your pardon. In all future conversation I will do my best to limit myself to words of two syllables.

FREEMAN: [*Smiling.*] I dimly perceive that you're trying to make yourself disagreeable, and I wonder why.

ALGY: I'm coming to the conclusion that I don't like you.

FREEMAN: It distresses me infinitely. May I inquire why?

ALGY: I haven't quite made up my mind. I only know that at present you don't meet with my approval. You don't mind my telling you, do you?

FREEMAN: Not at all. I never mind what a man says to me when I know I could knock him down if I wanted to.

ALGY: You know, Rose, this brother of yours is uncivilised. That is what is the matter with him. He smells too strongly of mother earth.

FREEMAN: I suppose your nostrils are more accustomed to patchouli.

ALGY: A repartee at last, and what a bad one! You're lamentably of your period.

FREEMAN: I beg your pardon?

ALGY: You positively reek of nineteen hundred and one.

ROSE: You're a great disappointment, Tom. You've changed in the most extraordinary way.

FREEMAN: I? If you'd asked me an hour ago, I'd have said I was just the same as ever I was. But now . . . I wonder if it's I who've changed, or all of you?

ROSE: [*With comic desperation.*] Oh, my dear, don't take a casual remark too seriously. What would become of

conversation if every time one said it was a fine day one was answered with a philosophical reflection?

FREEMAN: [*Getting up and stretching himself.*] I suppose I have changed. I remember that I left England with a sinking heart. When the slump came that broke me, I thought I'd lost everything worth living for. I couldn't realise life away from London, with theatres and music-halls. My idea of a holiday was supper at Romano's. I hunted a bit, I raced a bit, and I have no doubt that I drank more than was good for me.

ALGY: My dear fellow, aren't you making a speech?

FREEMAN: [*Looking at him.*] I suppose I was very like you.

ALGY: I beg your pardon?

FREEMAN: I see in you the man I must have been, and I'm filled with a very lively feeling of disgust.

ALGY: [*Imperturbably.*] I don't believe you were ever half as agreeable as I am.

FREEMAN: I bless that slump now that ruined me. Except for that I might be making five thousand a year.

ROSE: And Emily Chapman would be driving her own car.

DALLAS-BAKER: But what on earth made you go out to the Cape?

FREEMAN: It was the obvious thing to do, and I'd done the obvious all my life . . . I began to learn a thing or two very quickly. I went out second-class, you know, and there were some pretty rough fellows on board. We had some dirty weather in the Channel and I was as sick as a dog. In the evening I went on deck to get a breath of air, and as I passed the smoking-room some great hulking brute, three parts drunk, called out to me to have a drink. Well, I wasn't feeling at all like drinks, and I refused.

DALLAS-BAKER: I must say I don't wonder.

FREEMAN: Then he came and caught hold of me and said: By God, you're going to have a drink. I told him to go to hell, and as he wouldn't let go of me, I hit him. He whipped out a revolver and I thought: Good Lord, that's the end of me. But I was in a beastly temper and there was a bottle of whisky on the bar at my elbow. I dare say it's never struck you what a good weapon a full bottle makes.

ALGY: The only use to which civilised people put full bottles is emptying them.

FREEMAN: Well, before he could shoot, I caught the bottle by the neck and gave him simply a thundering swipe over the head with it. He just went down like a stone and there was about the thickest row I've ever been in.

DALLAS-BAKER: I can say quite frankly that I should hate to go out to the Cape second-class if that is the way they treat the inoffensive traveller.

FREEMAN: Oh well, that was a good many years ago.

DALLAS-BAKER: Weren't you hurt?

FREEMAN: I was rather knocked about, but nobody tried to play the fool with me any more. And the man I'd stunned was in bed for a fortnight. He was the first man I'd ever downed in my life, and d'you know, it gave me a lot of satisfaction. It's a ripping sensation to knock a man down.

ALGY: I dare say I should like it if there was no chance of his hitting me back when he got up.

FREEMAN: It not only cured me of seasickness, but it gave me a lot of food for reflection. It occurred to me that a gift for repartee was not nearly so useful in the life I was going to as a good heavy fist. And within three months I was thanking my stars that I'd got a strong pair of arms.

ROSE: Why?

FREEMAN: Because, when I came to the end of my money I was glad to get a job as luggage porter in a Jo'burg hotel. And I got it because anyone could see I was a beefy sort of cove.

ROSE: But why didn't you write?

FREEMAN: Well, I thought I'd like to come through on my own. And I've done it. I've got a rattling fine farm in Rhodesia, and I've made a bit of money. There's only one thing I want now, and I've come over to England to get it.

DALLAS-BAKER: And what is that?

ALGY: It's even money between an agricultural implement and a bagatelle board.

FREEMAN: It happens to be neither.

ALGY: Sold again!

FREEMAN: For a good many years I had to work so devilish hard that I had no time for thinking, but after a bit I began to think a little. I used to look at the dawn on the veldt and think how jolly life was, and I used to look at the stars and wonder what the devil life meant. But after a time I got sick of that and I grew restless and humpy. I couldn't make out what the deuce was the matter with me. Suddenly I hit it. I knew what I wanted, and I packed up my trunk next day.

ROSE: Well, do tell us what it is, Tom.

FREEMAN: My dear, what should it be? I'd discovered that man was not made to live alone.

ROSE: A wife?

FREEMAN: I've got six clear weeks to find one.

ALGY: You'd better advertise.

FREEMAN: Well, I wouldn't mind that at a pinch. But I thought Rose might be able to do something for me.

ROSE: I? D'you want *me* to find you a wife?

DALLAS-BAKER: But what about love?

FREEMAN: One can't do everything in six weeks. But if you put a strong healthy man and a strong healthy woman together, love will come. I promise to love anyone who's not absolutely plain and who has a good temper and a good appetite.

ALGY: Rose, we'll start a matrimonial agency.

ROSE: [*Smiling.*] You must give me the exact list of your requirements.

FREEMAN: I haven't got many. I only want my wife to be a decent, honest sort of woman, not afraid of work, and it's no good her caring much for society because the only society she's likely to get is ruine.

ROSE: Upon my word, I don't know anyone who'd do.

[*SMITH comes in.*]

SMITH: [*To ALGY.*] A messenger-boy has brought your bag round, sir. There's eightpence to pay.

ALGY: Oh, Herbert, you might give Smith eightpence, will you?

SMITH: [*To FREEMAN.*] Here are your keys, sir.

FREEMAN: [*Indifferently.*] Thank you.

END OF THE FIRST ACT

THE SECOND ACT

SCENE: *The dining-room in the DALLAS-BAKERS' flat. There is a round table in the middle set out for luncheon for one person. On one side is a Sberaton sideboard, and near it a trap-door through which dishes can be handed from the kitchen. There are Sberaton chairs about the room; in the corner is a grandfather's clock; on the walls are autotypes of English pictures. There is the same suggestion as in the drawing-room of undistinguished good taste. There are two windows at the back.*

SMITH *is seated by one of the windows; she has a little pile of linen by her side, and is darning a sock. At the other window on a pair of steps is FLETCHER, the porter of the flats. He is cleaning the windows. On the floor by his side is a pail of water, and he has a rag made into a swab in his hands. He is a perky young man with a small moustache. He wears the trousers of his porter's uniform, shirt-sleeves of grey flannel, and a long, rather dirty apron. When the curtain rises for a moment there is silence. Both go on with their work. Then SMITH looks up at the clock.*

SMITH: You'll have to get out of here in a minute.

FLETCHER: I've just finished. I've only got the polishing to do.

SMITH: It's getting near your dinner-time, isn't it?

FLETCHER: I've been thinking I felt a vacuum this last 'alf-hour.

SMITH: Is that your last window?

FLETCHER: Yes, and jolly glad I am, too. I've been cleaning windows since eight o'clock this morning.

SMITH: Cook was saying she wondered you did all the flats in one day.

FLETCHER: All my block I do. I like to get 'em over. When I sit down to my sausages and mash I like to say to myself: There, Albert, you've earned so much.

SMITH: I suppose it pays you pretty well cleaning the windows?

FLETCHER: Well, it depends what you call paying.

SMITH: How much do they give you?

FLETCHER: Sixpence a window, large and small.

SMITH: I wouldn't mind doing it for that.

FLETCHER: It's not woman's work.

SMITH: And what d'you do with the money?

FLETCHER: Put it in the savings-bank. That's one thing people can't say about me, they can't say I'm not steady.

SMITH: And there's another thing they can't say about you, they can't say you haven't got a good opinion of yourself.

FLETCHER: That's a nice thing to say to a feller.

SMITH: [*With a chuckle.*] That's why I said it.

FLETCHER: [*Turning round and leaving off his work.*] I kep' this room till the last.

SMITH: Convenient, just when lunch is ready.

FLETCHER: I suppose you don't know why, do you?

SMITH: I do not.

FLETCHER: Well, you give a guess, and I'll tell you if you're right.

SMITH: I've got something better to do, thank you.

FLETCHER: [*Getting down from the steps.*] Look 'ere, you ain't forgot what I asked you the other day.

SMITH: I haven't had much chance, as you've reminded me every time I've seen you.

FLETCHER: What 'ave you got against me?

SMITH: I haven't got anything against you.

FLETCHER: I'm steady.

SMITH: Oh, steadiness isn't everything in a man.

FLETCHER: Now, that's just like a woman. If you're steady they want you wild, and if you're wild they want you steady.

SMITH: I'm sorry for that donkey.

FLETCHER: [*Surprised.*] What donkey?

SMITH: The donkey whose hind leg you could talk off.

FLETCHER: Now look 'ere, for the third time of asking: I've got twenty-five bob a week, and there's the window-cleaning and the Christmas-boxes and the tips.

SMITH: I tell you I'm thinking of it. I can't do more than that.

FLETCHER: What's service? Work, work, work, and no thanks for it.

SMITH: It wouldn't be all play, play, play, if I was married.

FLETCHER: Well, you would be working for yourself, and chance it. We could make a nice little 'ome downstairs.

SMITH: I don't know as I want to live all my life in a basement.

FLETCHER: Well, where do you want to live?

SMITH: That's my business.

FLETCHER: Oh! [*Pause.*] D'you mean you won't?

SMITH: Bless the man, I don't mean anything. I don't say yes, and I don't say no.

FLETCHER: Oh!

SMITH: If you don't like to leave it at that, you can take yourself off and your steps and your dirty water.

FLETCHER: All right, I won't hurry you.

[He takes up the pail and his steps and goes towards the door. He stops.]

FLETCHER: You wouldn't come to a music-'all with me, my next evening off, would you?

SMITH: [*Smiling.*] P'raps I couldn't get out.

FLETCHER: And if you could?

SMITH: Well, I might if you pressed me. But mind, it wouldn't mean yes.

FLETCHER: It wouldn't mean no either, would it?

SMITH: It would mean that I was making up my mind.

FLETCHER: [*He puts down his things and comes forward.*] You don't dislike me, do you?

SMITH: You take them things away and go and have your dinner.

FLETCHER: There's no getting a straight answer out of you to anything.

SMITH: I don't dislike you more than I dislike anybody else.

FLETCHER: Well, that's better than a poke in the eye with a blunt stick, ain't it?

SMITH: I suppose it is.

FLETCHER: Good morning to you.

SMITH: Good morning.

[*He goes out. SMITH proceeds with her work, smiling to herself as she thinks of the conversation she has just had. She puts down the sock she has been darning and takes up another, puts her hand through the hole in it and laughs. FREEMAN comes in. She gets up and gathers her work together.*]

FREEMAN: Don't move.

SMITH: I brought my work in here, sir, because the light's better. In these flats you can't see to do anything at the back.

FREEMAN: Those look suspiciously like some things of mine.

SMITH: Yes, sir.

FREEMAN: Did my—did Mrs. Dallas-Baker tell you to mend them?

SMITH: [*Concealing the shadow of a smile.*] No, sir. They was in such a state, I thought I'd better try and do something with them.

FREEMAN: D'you often do work that you're not told to do?

SMITH: When I see a thing wants doing, sir, I try and do it.

FREEMAN: That's not the way to get on in service, you know.

SMITH: I don't like to see a gentleman go about in rags.

FREEMAN: I'm afraid some of my things are in rather a beastly state.

SMITH: Well, the truth is, it's just waste of labour mending them. [*She puts her hand through the hole in the sock.*] Look at that, sir!

FREEMAN: I'd better buy some more, hadn't I?

SMITH: Well, sir, I don't think it would do you any harm.

FREEMAN: I'll get half a dozen pairs to-day.

SMITH: If you'd excuse me saying it, sir, I'd get a dozen while you're about it. It makes them last ever so much longer.

FREEMAN: [*Smiling.*] All right, I'll get a dozen pairs.

SMITH: And you want some pyjamas badly, sir.

FREEMAN: Very well, I'll get some pyjamas.

SMITH: Are you ready for your lunch, sir?

FREEMAN: Rather. Is Mrs. Dallas-Baker not coming in?

SMITH: No, sir.

FREEMAN: All right.

[*SMITH goes out. In a moment she comes in again with an entrée-dish in which there are eggs. FREEMAN sits down. She hands him the eggs and he takes some. She puts them back on the sideboard.*]

SMITH: Will you drink hock or claret, sir?

FREEMAN: Hock, please.

[*She pours out some hock for him, and stands by the sideboard while he eats. He gives her a look.*]

FREEMAN: You need not wait if you don't want to. I can ring when I'm ready.

SMITH: [*Without moving.*] Thank you, sir. [*Pause.*]

FREEMAN: D'you like to stand there and watch me eat?

SMITH: I like to do things properly, sir.

FREEMAN: Just as you choose.

SMITH: If you'd rather I didn't wait, sir . . .

FREEMAN: I wish you to please yourself. [*Pause.*]

FREEMAN: Will you give the cook my compliments and tell her these eggs are capital?

SMITH: Thank you, sir. [*Pause.*]

FREEMAN: Oh, I'm very much obliged to you for looking after my linen.

SMITH: Thank you, sir.

FREEMAN: I've not had anyone to do that sort of thing for me for a very long time.

[*SMITH hands the dish to him again.*]

FREEMAN: No, thank you. . . . Jolly weather, isn't it?

SMITH: Yes, sir.

[*She takes his plate away and puts a clean one in its place. She opens a trap-door in the wall and receives a dish which is pushed through from the kitchen. She hands him cutlets and potatoes.*]

FREEMAN: It's rather dull eating alone, isn't it?

SMITH: Some people mind it and some people don't.

FREEMAN: You don't object to my making a few attempts at conversation, do you?

SMITH: Not if you wish it, sir.

FREEMAN: [*With a twinkle in his eye.*] You mustn't expect too much of me. You see, I've been away so long.

[*SMITH stands sedately by the sideboard. After a moment's hesitation she makes up her mind to speak.*]

SMITH: Excuse me, sir, is Rhodesia far?

FREEMAN: It is, rather.

SMITH: Farther than Australia?

FREEMAN: I don't know. Why?

SMITH: I was thinking.

FREEMAN: Your father's a farmer, isn't he?

SMITH: Yes, sir.

FREEMAN: So am I, you know.

SMITH: I expect you farm a lot of land.

FREEMAN: Two thousand acres.

SMITH: That makes all the difference. They say you can't make farming pay unless you do it on a big scale.

FREEMAN: Why d'you go into service instead of helping your father?

SMITH: Oh, we've all gone out, sir. There are too many mouths to feed at home, and father has enough to do to make both ends meet.

FREEMAN: D'you like being a parlourmaid?

SMITH: One has to do what one can, sir.

FREEMAN: Why don't you go to Rhodesia? Able-bodied young women are worth their weight in gold out there.

SMITH: I was thinking of it.

FREEMAN: [*Taken aback.*] Thinking of going to Rhodesia?

SMITH: No, sir. I don't know anything about Rhodesia. I've got a sister married in Sydney, and she says I can stay with her till I get something to do. She was a cook, and one of them agencies got hold of her and took her out.

[*SMITH stops as she realises that she is talking too much.*

She hands the cutlets to FREEMAN.

FREEMAN: No, thank you. [*SMITH takes his plate away.*] Yes?

SMITH: I forget when I begin talking.

FREEMAN: Oh, that doesn't matter. Fire away.

SMITH: I don't know what Mr. Thompson would say if he caught me talking to a gentleman while I was waiting at table.

FREEMAN: Who's Mr. Thompson?

SMITH: He was the butler in my first place, sir, and he trained me.

FREEMAN: [*Smiling.*] Well, I think there is every reason to believe that Mr. Thompson isn't in the least likely to find out.

[SMITH opens the trap-door and gets another dish.

FREEMAN: If that's a sweet you're bringing me I won't have it at any price. Give me a little bit of cheese, and I shall have had enough to last me a week.

SMITH: Very good, sir.

FREEMAN: [*As she hands him the cheese.*] Go on about your sister.

SMITH: I don't think the mistress would like me to talk to you, sir.

FREEMAN: Then I shan't eat any cheese.

SMITH: [*With a very slight, shy smile.*] Well, she hadn't been in Sydney three months before a gentleman asked her to marry him. He was a cab-proprietor, and now she can ride in forty-three cabs if she likes. As I wrote and told her, she's carriage-folk now and no mistake.

FREEMAN: And—pardon my asking—has she got a cab-proprietor waiting for you?

SMITH: They're not all cab-proprietors in Sydney.

FREEMAN: I expect there'd be some congestion of traffic if they were.

SMITH: [*Innocently.*] And they couldn't all make a living, could they?

FREEMAN: [*Smiling.*] I suppose they'd be reduced to driving one another about.

SMITH: My sister says I'd marry in six months if I liked.

FREEMAN: Have you taken a ticket yet?

SMITH: I'm in no hurry.

FREEMAN: But you ought to marry. That's what young women are made for.

SMITH: I don't need to go to the other side of the world to do that.

FREEMAN: That sounds as if you had something in view not very far from London.

SMITH: Well, I may have and I may not.

FREEMAN: I suppose you wouldn't tell me who it is.

SMITH: You've finished your cheese, sir.

FREEMAN: I'll have an apple. . . . No, all right. You needn't bother about changing my plate.

[She hands him the apples.]

FREEMAN: *[As he takes one.]* Well?

SMITH: I am talking, sir.

FREEMAN: It helps my digestion.

SMITH: Well, sir, there is a young fellow who's asked me to have him. And of course if I do I shan't go to Sydney.

FREEMAN: D'you like him?

SMITH: Well, sir, I like him. But I don't know if I like him well enough to marry him. He always makes me laugh at the things he says.

FREEMAN: That's not a bad thing in a husband, you know.

SMITH: I don't know if I should laugh at them if I heard them all day long.

FREEMAN: That's always the danger of marrying a humorist.

SMITH: And he gets so cross when I say chestnuts.

FREEMAN: Oh, they're touchy. They look upon it as a personal affront if you've heard their jokes before.

[FREEMAN takes a cigarette out of his case.]

SMITH: I'll see if your coffee's ready, sir.

'She goes out. Presently DALLAS-BAKER comes in.

FREEMAN: Hulloo, are you back?

DALLAS-BAKER: Yes. Saturday afternoon, you know. I didn't expect to find anybody in.

FREEMAN: [*Getting up.*] Where is Rose? Do you know?

DALLAS-BAKER: Not in the least. I suppose she's lunching somewhere with Algy.

FREEMAN: You appear to be singularly indifferent to her whereabouts.

DALLAS-BAKER: [*Lightly.*] I'm the model husband. I make a point of never interfering.

[*SMITH comes in with coffee, to which FREEMAN helps himself.*

FREEMAN: You're not going to have any coffee?

DALLAS-BAKER: No, I've already had it. I lunched in Hall.

[*SMITH goes out. FREEMAN hesitates for a moment, then decides to speak.*

FREEMAN: I've been wanting to have a talk with you for two or three days.

DALLAS-BAKER: Oh?

FREEMAN: I hate being told to mind my own business, and I dare say that's exactly what you'll tell me.

DALLAS-BAKER: [*With a vague gesture.*] My dear fellow . . .

FREEMAN: D'you think it's wise to let Rose go about so much with Peppercorn?

DALLAS-BAKER: [*Surprised.*] Why shouldn't she?

FREEMAN: [*Somewhat embarrassed.*] I've been here a fortnight. Not a day has passed without that young man coming to at least one meal. I never come into the flat without finding him sprawling. And when he's not here it's because he's out with Rose.

DALLAS-BAKER: Rose likes him.

FREEMAN: [*Frigidly.*] That is a fact which could hardly escape one's observation.

DALLAS-BAKER: But I like him too. He's just as much my friend as Rose's.

FREEMAN: [*Dryly.*] Yes.

DALLAS-BAKER: And . . . and she does him good. It's the very best thing for a young man to go about with a woman older than himself.

FREEMAN: If I were in your place I should think the toe of my boot would be a damned sight better for him than the uninterrupted society of my wife.

DALLAS-BAKER: But . . . You don't suggest that I should . . .

[*He stops, puzzled and bothered.*]

FREEMAN: Kick him out? I do indeed.

DALLAS-BAKER: But I've got no reason to do anything of the kind. He's always been charming to me. Besides, Rose wouldn't hear of it.

FREEMAN: Rose can be brought to see that she's making a fool of herself.

DALLAS-BAKER: But I like him. I'm very much attached to him.

FREEMAN: I suppose there's no accounting for taste.

DALLAS-BAKER: If you'll forgive my saying so, I think this is a matter on which you're not capable of judging. You've been living in a primitive state where men are tyrants and women chattels. But this is London.

FREEMAN: My dear fellow, in London, Buluwayo, or Kamchatka there's only one result of throwing a young man and a young woman in one another's society all day long.

DALLAS-BAKER: Nonsense. It's a convention of novelists that you can't leave two persons of opposite sex alone for five minutes without asterisks—and a baby. We live in a highly civilised community. We've got ten thousand interests to occupy us. Algy's never thought of Rose in that way.

FREEMAN: Then all I can say is, more fool he.

DALLAS-BAKER: [*Astounded.*] What!

FREEMAN: Rose is a pretty woman. She's well dressed and very jolly. If a young man can be with her morning, noon and night, with all the advantages of a complacent husband who sits by and twiddles his thumbs, and he doesn't make love to her, he must be a contemptible ass.

DALLAS-BAKER: But . . . but you're contradicting yourself. You're grossly contradicting yourself.

FREEMAN: No, I'm not. With decent, normal people, friendship between the sexes is impossible. It either leads on to love or it follows it.

DALLAS-BAKER: [*Ironically.*] An *bors d'œuvre* or a savoury, I suppose.

FREEMAN: If you like.

DALLAS-BAKER: [*Beginning to be vexed.*] Rose knows quite well how to take care of herself. After all, I know her better than you do, I suppose. She's my wife.

FREEMAN: [*Frigidly.*] If she weren't, you can bet your boots I shouldn't be discussing her with you.

DALLAS-BAKER: She's not at all the sort of woman to do anything silly. She takes no interest in love and that kind of nonsense.

FREEMAN: Surely she has her five senses like other women?

DALLAS-BAKER: Of course she has her five senses, but they're spiritualised. They're . . . You're so coarse . . .

FREEMAN: My dear fellow, in that case I'd much sooner they committed adultery.

DALLAS-BAKER: [*Astounded.*] What!

FREEMAN: It's far better that they should be decent, normal people and break every commandment in the Decalogue than the monsters you represent them. They must be beneath apes.

DALLAS-BAKER: Come, come, this is going too far. This is beyond a joke. Really . . . I don't know what you

mean. Beneath apes! Monstrous, monstrous. You've got no . . . Upon my soul . . .

[He bubbles over with incoherent indignation.]

[ROSE and ALGY come in. She is in walking costume.]

ROSE: Why on earth are you in here? *[She remarks her husband's vexation.]* What's the matter?

DALLAS-BAKER: *[Irritably.]* The matter? Nothing's the matter. A joke's a joke.

[He goes out muttering to himself.]

ALGY: *[To FREEMAN.]* I can't help thinking you've been trying to make yourself amiable.

[ROSE gives FREEMAN a look, and then follows her husband out of the room.]

FREEMAN: Apparently my efforts haven't met with the success they no doubt deserved.

ALGY: I suspect that your touch is a little—elephantine.

FREEMAN: *[Good-humouredly.]* You can't expect me to have such a facility for small talk as you who make a business of it.

ALGY: An art, my dear fellow, an art.

FREEMAN: I hope you find it a profitable one.

ALGY: It is my only means of livelihood, and as you see I go to a tolerable tailor . . . I am able to lunch at the Ritz when the fancy seizes me.

FREEMAN: *[Blandly.]* But then, unless I'm mistaken, you allow your companion to pay the bill.

ALGY: I perceive you are trying to be somewhat offensive.

FREEMAN: I should have thought you perceived I was succeeding.

ALGY: They have such queer notions of good manners in the British Colonies.

FREEMAN: *[Deliberately.]* Haven't you been lunching with Rose?

ALGY: I have.

FREEMAN: And didn't she pay the bill?

ALGY: She did.

FREEMAN: I'm afraid you'll think me unreasonably squeamish. I shouldn't like to have a meal stood me by a woman. It would make me feel uncomfortably like one of those alien gentlemen for whom the police provided a ticket for the Continent and an escort to Charing Cross.

ALGY: [*With a laugh.*] You're too absurd. Why on earth shouldn't Rose ask me to lunch with her at a restaurant just as much as in her own house?

FREEMAN: Can you tell me *why* she should ask you to lunch with her at all?

ALGY: Certainly. She finds me useful, entertaining and instructive.

FREEMAN: [*Sarcastically.*] I suppose you've been helping her to try on a new frock this morning?

ALGY: No, we bought half a dozen pairs of stockings, and then we went to the National Gallery.

FREEMAN: How old are you?

ALGY: Twenty-eight. But I think I look less.

FREEMAN: You appear healthy enough and fairly strong. Haven't you ever done any work?

ALGY: I was once in a motor-car business, but it went smash.

FREEMAN: Why don't you do something else?

ALGY: I'm vaguely looking out for another motor-car business.

FREEMAN: That seems to be the refuge of every incompetent wastrel in the kingdom.

ALGY: In Europe, my dear fellow.

FREEMAN: I should have more patience with you if you were a fool pure and simple, but you're not that.

ALGY: Now you flatter me. I must be on my guard.

FREEMAN: You're shrewd enough in your way. I dare say you could make quite a decent living if you tried, but you prefer to be a parasite.

ALGY: That's a good word.

FREEMAN: But what an unpleasant thing.

ALGY: My dear fellow, we're taught to do our duty in that state of life in which a merciful Providence has placed us. A merciful Providence has provided me with a fond mother who can afford to give me board and lodging, but not enough money to buy clothes and tobacco.

FREEMAN: And rather than work you live on your friends?

ALGY: I wouldn't put it in that way. The civilisation of the present day has given rise to a variety of professions, and I have adopted one which is not nearly so well paid as it should be, considering how essential it is to modern society.

FREEMAN: And that is?

ALGY: It is too new to have a definite name, but those who follow it are known either as poodle dogs or tame cats.

FREEMAN. [*Amused against his will.*] You have no false shame.

ALGY: Why should I? I am a benefactor of my species. What d'you suppose Rose and Herbert would do without me? And there are thousands of couples like them who are bored to death with their own company and want a man like me to amuse them. I shop with Rose, and take her to the play when Herbert has briefs to read. I play bridge with her in the afternoons, and when she gives a party I make things go off well. On Sundays I play golf with Herbert, and I play just well enough for him to beat me on the last green. If Rose is unwell I play piquet with him in the evening. In return they make life pleasant for me. They take me away with them in the vacations, and when a tradesman duns me neither Herbert nor Rose minds lending me a tenner. When

they get a car I shall buy it for them, which means a commission, and I shall drive it for them, which means innocent recreation, and when they are not using it I shall be able to take my friends for a spin in it.

FREEMAN: Which means inexpensive hospitality. But are you under the impression that this sort of thing will go on for ever?

ALGY: Not at all. I find by experience that these jobs last about two years. I was two years with the Whitstables—of course the peerage adds to one's value afterwards, but it isn't much catch—Lady Whitstable wanted the earth, but she wanted it at a great reduction. And I was two years with the Isaac Cohens. Give me Jews every time. Charming people.

FREEMAN: Generous, I suppose?

ALGY: And really not at all exacting.

FREEMAN: And after two years?

ALGY: [*With a shrug of the shoulders.*] They get sick of me. I can't keep them on good terms with one another any more, and they turn and rend *me*. I know all the signs a month or two beforehand, and I start looking out for somebody else.

FREEMAN: And are you content to go on in that way for the rest of your life?

ALGY: I'm not thinking of it. A tame cat, like an actor, should make his final bow before his public gets tired of him. One of these days—to-morrow or in ten years—I shall fall in love with a nice girl with about two thousand a year.

FREEMAN: And why should she marry you?

ALGY: Because I'm amusing, or because I know nice people, or because I ask her—the commonest reason for which an heiress marries a pauper—and we shall live very comfortably on her money.

FREEMAN: A parasite to the end. I'd rather sweep a crossing.

ALGY: That is where we differ. I wouldn't.

FREEMAN: I'm afraid you'll think me an awful donkey, but I don't believe you can get any permanent satisfaction out of life without working.

ALGY: What nonsense! Work is merely the refuge from boredom of the unintellectual. I couldn't honestly describe myself as that.

[ROSE comes in with red cheeks and flaming eyes, in a towering passion.]

ROSE: [Going up to FREEMAN.] What have you been saying to Herbert? [For a moment FREEMAN does not answer, but looks at her. She bursts out again.] It's infamous. How dare you! How dare you interfere with me!

FREEMAN: [Turning to ALGY.] Would you like to make yourself scarce, young man?

ALGY: [With a smile.] Not particularly.

FREEMAN: I'm afraid I must ask you to.

ALGY: I don't know any spectacle more entertaining than a quarrel between nearest and dearest.

FREEMAN: Will you tell him to go, Rose?

ROSE: No.

FREEMAN: My dear, if I spoke to Herbert it was because I thought it the only decent thing to do.

ROSE: [Violently.] You had no right. . . .

FREEMAN: [To ALGY.] It may surprise you, but I'm quite old-fashioned. I wash my dirty linen in private. You must clear out.

ALGY: I'm sorry, but I don't intend to.

FREEMAN: If you don't I swear I'll knock you down.

ALGY: Then I'm afraid you must knock me down. You're

obviously much stronger than I am, but this is an occasion when it's better to take a licking than to knuckle under.

FREEMAN: [*Wondering at his unexpected spirit.*] By Jovel

ROSE: Please go, Algy.

ALGY: Certainly. [*At the door to FREEMAN, smiling.*] You know, I never thought for a moment you'd hit me. A scuffle in a room—with a woman in it—one talks about that sort of thing, but it doesn't come off.

[*He goes out.*]

ROSE: Now, what have you to say to me?

FREEMAN: [*Going towards her to take her in his arms.*] Look here, Rose. . . .

ROSE: [*Pushing him away.*] For goodness' sake, don't touch me.

FREEMAN: Won't you sit down and let us talk quietly?

ROSE: [*Impatiently.*] Oh, I know what you're going to do. You're going to sentimentalise. You expect me to lean my head on your shoulder and weep salt tears. And your voice will grow husky with emotion. No, thank you. You can keep all that to yourself.

FREEMAN: We shall understand one another better if we make use of a little sympathy.

ROSE: What has sympathy got to do with it? We ask you to come and stay here. We tell you to treat the place like an hotel.

FREEMAN: If I'd wanted an hotel I should have stayed at one.

ROSE: [*Going on without paying any attention to what he says.*] We make absolutely no claims upon you, and you can find nothing better to do than to fill my husband with ridiculous suspicions about Algy and me.

FREEMAN: Don't forget that I spoke to you about it first, and you refused to listen to me. I told you that I should go to Herbert.

ROSE: [*Impatiently.*] One says those things.

FREEMAN: All the affection I'm capable of is placed on you.
What do you expect me to do when I see you behaving
in a way that—that . . .

[*He stops in embarrassment.*]

ROSE: What right have you to preach at me? You set yourself upon a ridiculous pedestal. . . .

FREEMAN: [*Interrupting.*] Far from it.

ROSE: D'you think I don't know that father had to pay money to get you out of a scrape with a woman at Cambridge? D'you think I don't know what people said about you and Queenie Bishop?

FREEMAN: If I came rather a cropper that's no reason why you should come one too.

ROSE: After all, what is it that you've got to reproach me with?

FREEMAN: I think your behaviour with Algy Peppercorn is awfully indiscreet. You must know there can only be one explanation of it.

ROSE: But Algy is just as much Herbert's friend as mine.

FREEMAN: I implore you to send him about his business before it's too late.

ROSE: What nonsense! You're so theatrical. D'you mean to say you think there's anything really between Algy and me?

FREEMAN: My dear, how can you expect me to answer that question?

ROSE: No, no; I ask it quite seriously.

FREEMAN: I hope with all my heart there isn't.

ROSE: Yes or no?

[*Pause.*]

FREEMAN: Yes.

ROSE: [*Bursting into a scream of laughter.*] Poor Algy, I can't imagine anything that would bore him more than to make love to me.

FREEMAN: [*Good-humouredly.*] Well, at all events I've made you laugh.

ROSE: You're really too ridiculous.

FREEMAN: What do you suppose Algy cares for you? He's only on the make like the rest of your friends. If he came across a woman to-morrow out of whom he could do a little better than out of you, he'd fling you aside like an old glove.

ROSE: Oh, well, I shall get tired of him long before he gets tired of me.

FREEMAN: Will you let me say something to you that I've had on my heart almost ever since I came here? [*She does not answer. He sits down on the arm of her chair and takes her hand.*] You know, it is a rotten life you're leading, and these people you've got around you—what a poor lot they are! There's Cynthia . . . [*He can't remember her name.*]

ROSE: Rosenberg.

FREEMAN: She's married a fat old German stockbroker for his money, and when her baby's ill she has the heart to leave it all day. She won't nurse it because it would interfere with her amusements. And Emily Chapman—she ought to have married years ago.

ROSE: It's not for want of trying that she hasn't.

FREEMAN: You told me about her broken engagements before I'd been twenty-four hours in the house. I'm awfully sorry for her. Her life consists merely of going from one bridge party to another. And d'you think she gets any happiness out of it? You're only got to look into her eyes to see how restless and dissatisfied she is.

ROSE: She didn't treat you so well that you need waste much sympathy on her.

FREEMAN: I'm sure at heart she's a very decent girl. If she could only find a nice man . . .

ROSE: [*Interrupting.*] Why don't you marry her yourself?

FREEMAN: What would she do on an African farm? And you're restless and dissatisfied too, Rose. Don't you think you'd be far happier if you had children?

ROSE: But I tell you we can't afford it.

FREEMAN: It only means giving up a few selfish pleasures.

ROSE: I dare say it'll horrify you, but I prefer the selfish pleasures.

FREEMAN: What if you could have both? I'm not a rich man, but I can afford myself a sentimental luxury now and then. If you'll have a child I'll settle a couple of hundred a year on it, so that it shall cost you nothing.

ROSE: The truth is, I don't want a child. It would bore me to death. I haven't the maternal instinct, and there's an end of it.

[*EMILY CHAPMAN comes in.*]

EMILY: May I come in?

ROSE: [*Kissing her.*] I didn't know you were here. You haven't been waiting, have you?

EMILY: No, Smith said you were in the dining-room, so I walked in. [*Holding out her hand to FREEMAN.*] How d'you do?

FREEMAN: [*Shaking hands.*] How d'you do? [*To ROSE.*] I wish you'd have the table cleared, Rose. I've got a little work to do, and I'd like to use it.

ROSE: All right.

FREEMAN: I'll go and fetch my things. [*He goes out.*]

ROSE: I'm getting rather tired of Tom. I don't think I can stand his disapproval of everything I do much longer.

EMILY: Have you been having a row?

ROSE: He's been lecturing me about Algy. It's rather funny, isn't it? Tom?

EMILY: He's changed a good deal in the last eight years.

ROSE: He's become quite impossible. I wish to goodness he'd find a wife and take himself off.

[EMILY CHAPMAN looks at her for a moment, hesitates, and then speaks.]

EMILY: Would you hate it if I married him?

ROSE: [*After a very slight pause of surprise.*] My dear, you'd do me the greatest possible service.

EMILY: I suppose you've told him that I've been twice engaged since he went away?

ROSE: [*With a smile.*] No, of course not. As if I should.

EMILY: I know that you can queer the whole thing if you like. That's why I thought it would be better to speak to you first. I dare say you saw I was thinking of it?

ROSE: I concluded that you hadn't come here every day for a week merely to see me.

EMILY: [*With a certain anxiety and something of appeal in her voice.*] You wouldn't do anything shabby to me, Rose?

ROSE: [*Smiling.*] Of course not.

EMILY: If you've got anything against it I won't even try.

ROSE: I haven't, honour bright. What are you going to do?

EMILY: [*Shrugging her shoulders.*] He's such a sentimentalist.

ROSE: [*Laughing as she catches EMILY's meaning.*] Upon my word, you are clever.

EMILY: [*With a deprecating smile.*] When a man's feeling so awfully sorry for you . . .

ROSE: Would you like me to leave you alone? Oh, I forgot about Smith.

[*She rings the bell and goes towards the door.*]

EMILY: It seems horrid to turn you out of your own dining-room.

ROSE: Nonsense. I leave my best wishes with you.

[*She goes out. SMITH comes in. She starts clearing away. EMILY CHAPMAN changes her manner a little. She is very kind and bland with SMITH.*]

EMILY: Well, Smith, are you still pleased with London?

SMITH: Yes, thank you, miss.

EMILY: It must be very pleasant to give so much satisfaction.

Mrs. Dallas-Baker appears to be delighted with you.

SMITH: Thank you, miss.

EMILY: I suppose this is a smaller household than you've been used to.

SMITH: Yes, miss. I was with a butler before.

EMILY: Of course I don't want to suggest that you should leave, but if at any time you wanted to better yourself I could find you a very good place.

SMITH: Thank you, miss.

[EMILY CHAPMAN gives her a sharp look.]

EMILY: [With carefully assumed indifference.] Is Mr. Peppercorn dining here to-night?

SMITH: Yes, miss.

EMILY: He generally dines here, doesn't he?

SMITH: [Seeing what EMILY is driving at.] It all depends, miss.

EMILY: What does he do when Mr. Dallas-Baker's away on circuit?

SMITH: I don't know, miss.

[SMITH goes on taking the luncheon things away without looking up. EMILY CHAPMAN makes up her mind to have a dash at it.]

EMILY: You know, you ought to be very careful, Smith.

SMITH: Ought I, miss?

EMILY: It would be very unpleasant if you were mixed up in any bother. Of course, you haven't seen anything that . . .

SMITH: No, miss.

EMILY: [With a little laugh.] You're the most silent person I've ever come across.

SMITH: I'm not much of a one for talking, miss, of what doesn't concern me.

EMILY: You're a perfect treasure.

[She smiles with her lips, but when SMITH's back is turned she gives a little frown of anger. FREEMAN comes in and EMILY is quickly all smiles again. He has bundles of catalogues in his hands.]

EMILY: Good gracious, how businesslike you look! I'll fly.

FREEMAN: Please don't. They're only catalogues I've got to look through.

[He puts them down on the table, and SMITH, having finished, goes out. EMILY takes one and looks at it.]

EMILY: Agricultural implements.

FREEMAN: *[Referring to SMITH.]* Nice girl that. She's been talking to me.

EMILY: *[Lightly.]* Forward minx.

FREEMAN: It appears she wants to emigrate.

EMILY: Does she?

FREEMAN: It's very wise of her. In New South Wales she can get double the wages she can here, and she'll marry as soon as ever she wants to.

EMILY: You think that's the natural course for women, don't you?

FREEMAN: I think they're happier when they carry out the purposes of nature.

EMILY: *[Turning over the pages of the catalogue.]* I suppose you've been buying all sorts of things?

FREEMAN: Not yet, but I must hurry up. My time's getting very short.

EMILY: Why are you going so soon?

FREEMAN: I don't want to leave the farm to its own devices longer than I can help. Besides, it's my life. I want to get back to it.

EMILY: Are you happy out there?

FREEMAN: I never ask myself. . . . I dare say that is happiness.

EMILY: [*With a sudden break in her voice.*] Lucky man.

FREEMAN: You're not very happy, I'm afraid.

EMILY: Wretched.

FREEMAN: I'm awfully sorry.

EMILY: [*Forcing a smile.*] It's very nice of you. . . . But don't let us talk about me. It can do no good, and it only makes things worse to think about them.

FREEMAN: There's generally a way out of every difficulty.

EMILY: [*Holding out her hand.*] I know you'd do all you could for me, but there's nothing you *can* do.

FREEMAN: [*Taking her hand.*] Won't you tell me what is troubling you?

EMILY: Oh, my dear friend, it's nothing except that the years are passing one by one and I'm wasting my life. I'm useless in the world, a burden to myself and to everyone connected with me.

FREEMAN: Oh, what nonsense!

EMILY: And I've brought it all on myself, every bit of it. I have only myself to thank.

FREEMAN: [*Smiling. He does not gather the application to himself of her remark.*] Oh, come.

EMILY: I was willing enough to marry you when you had money. I threw you over when you lost it.

FREEMAN: Are you thinking of that? We were both very unfit for marriage in those days.

EMILY: You must despise me from the bottom of your heart.

FREEMAN: I promise you that I never think of you without sincere friendship and affection.

EMILY: Were you very much in love with me then? [*She begins to sob.*] Oh, if you only knew how unhappy I am.

FREEMAN: [*Deeply moved.*] Oh, my dear, don't cry. I can't bear it.

EMILY: Please go away. I'm only making a fool of myself. Oh, I've been so bitterly punished.

FREEMAN: For God's sake don't cry.

EMILY: [*With a husky low voice, as if the words were being dragged out of her against her will.*] It was only after you went that—that I knew how much I loved you. And when I saw you again the other day . . .

[FREEMAN gives a slight start and looks at her steadily.

EMILY: It was nothing to you. I saw that you thought me old and plain and horrible. But you were just the same, and it all came back to me. If you've wanted revenge you've got it.

FREEMAN: [*In a low voice.*] God knows, I never thought of revenge.

EMILY: And now, for heaven's sake, go. I don't want to see you any more. I won't be made so unhappy.

[*There is a pause. FREEMAN gets up, looks at her, and walks up and down. Then he stops.*

FREEMAN: Is it true that you care for me?

EMILY: Oh, don't. How can you humiliate me!

FREEMAN: There's very little love in the world. A man ought to be very grateful if a woman cares for him. Perhaps fate, bringing me back to England, had just that in view.

[*There is a pause. EMILY looks straight in front of her, hardly daring even to breathe. Every nerve is tense.*

FREEMAN: Do you understand what you're saying? I'm only a farmer, and it's a hard, lonely life that I lead, very different from any that you have known.

EMILY: If you knew how lonely I am.

FREEMAN: Poor thing, it's horrible, isn't it?

EMILY: There's not a soul in the world who cares for me.

[There is a moment's pause.]

FREEMAN: I have very little to offer you. If you will marry me I will try to make you a good husband.

EMILY: *[In a whisper.]* Tom.

[FREEMAN holds out his hands to her, and she, rising, takes them.]

EMILY: Tom.

[SMITH comes in.]

SMITH: A gentleman to see you, sir.

FREEMAN: Oh, I know. I'll come and see him at once. *[To*

EMILY.] It's a chap on business.

EMILY: Of course, please go to him.

[As FREEMAN goes to the door, EMILY gives a little sigh of relief and smiles quietly.]

END OF THE SECOND ACT

THE THIRD ACT

THE SCENE, *as in the first Act, is the drawing-room at the DALLAS-BAKERS' flat.*

The card-table is set out for bridge. DALLAS-BAKER, ROSE, EMILY CHAPMAN, and ALGY are finishing a rubber. ALGY is dummy.

EMILY: [*Taking up the last trick.*] Game and rubber.

ROSE: [*Jeily.*] You must be very unlucky in love, Emily. I never saw anyone hold such cards.

ALGY: [*Who has been adding up the score.*] Thirty-five bob.

DALLAS-BAKER: [*Looking at his watch.*] We've just got it over in time.

[A telephone bell is heard ringing outside.

ROSE: Oh, that dreadful bell. Do go and see who it is, Herbert.

DALLAS-BAKER: Very well. *[He gets up and goes out.*

ROSE: I hope it's not Cynthia Rosenberg. I shall never forgive her if she puts us off at this hour.

EMILY: There's always your husband to fall back upon.

ROSE: He's got to go out. He's speaking at some silly political meeting.

ALGY: It's lucky he was able to make a fourth till now.

ROSE: I told him to get home early if he could.

ALGY: It looks as if work was devilish slack at Lincoln's Inn. We shall have to start economising, Rose.

ROSE: It's dreadful, isn't it? And I want a car so badly.

ALGY: I heard the other day of a jolly second-hand one that'd just suit you. It's only been used three months.

ROSE: How much do they want for it?

[DALLAS-BAKER comes in.

ROSE: Who was it?

DALLAS-BAKER: Otto Rosenberg.

ROSE: How tiresome! Isn't Cynthia coming?

DALLAS-BAKER: I don't know. He wanted to know if she was here.

ROSE: He rang up about one o'clock and asked if I knew where she was lunching. It so happens I did, but I told Otto I hadn't an idea.

EMILY: What's he fussing about now?

ROSE: Oh, it's only the baby. Wretched little rickety brat, it's always ill.

DALLAS-BAKER: I promised we'd tell Cynthia the moment she came.

ROSE: She can't do any good, and it'll only worry her. Otto's an old woman, and he flies back from the City every time the child starts squalling.

DALLAS-BAKER: Still, I think we ought to tell her, Rose. Otto's very anxious she should go home at once.

ROSE: We'll tell her after we've had a rubber. I don't see why our afternoon should be entirely wasted because a peculiarly uninteresting baby isn't quite well.

ALGY: Hear, hear.

DALLAS-BAKER: Well, I dare say that'll do. It can't make much difference if she gets back half an hour sooner or later.

[FREEMAN comes in.

FREEMAN: [*Jovially.*] Hulloo, at it again?

[*He shakes hands smilingly with EMILY CHAPMAN.*

EMILY: [*Lightly.*] Not at the moment. We're waiting for Cynthia Rosenberg.

DALLAS-BAKER: [*Looking at his watch.*] I've unfortunately got to go out.

ALGY: His country calls, and he's going to tell the British

Elector how to do his duty. . . . Don't look at me as if you'd never set eyes on me before. It's rude.

FREEMAN: I was wondering if I'd seen you to-day. Did you have breakfast here? I forget.

ALGY: No, I always breakfast in bed. Mother thinks it so much better for me. I came to luncheon.

FREEMAN: Then I've not seen you. I wish you good morning.

ALGY: [*Chaffingly.*] It's too kind of you.

FREEMAN: I hope you passed a good night.

ALGY: I slept the sleep of the pure at heart.

FREEMAN: The news fills me with satisfaction.

ALGY: If it were possible to embarrass me, your politeness would cover me with confusion.

[SMITH enters, followed by MRS. OTTO ROSENBERG.

SMITH: Mrs. Rosenberg. [*Exit*

MRS. OTTO: I'm fearfully sorry to be so late. I've had all sorts of things to do.

ROSE: We were beginning to be very cross with you.

MRS. OTTO: [*Shaking hands with DALLAS-BAKER.*] How d'you do? I've had such a tiring day. I spent all the morning at my dressmaker's, and then I had to lunch at the Ritz with Montie Kenyon, and I had to pay about half a dozen calls, and I looked in at a private view, and then I had to go and have tea at the Carlton. I've never had such a rush in my life.

DALLAS-BAKER: A rubber will rest you, won't it?

MRS. OTTO: Yes, I really think it will. The only thing that kept me going was the thought of a rubber or two here before dinner.

FREEMAN: [*Smiling.*] There should really be an eight hours' day for the idle rich.

MRS. OTTO: [*Shaking hands with him.*] How d'you do? Do tell me how you're getting on.

FREEMAN: [*Not understanding.*] I?

MRS. OTTO: Rose told me you'd come to England to look for a wife. I was thinking it would be such a chance for me to get rid of some of my sisters-in-law.

FREEMAN: Are they very attractive?

MRS. OTTO: There are three of them—Rachel, Lydia, and Pom-pom.

FREEMAN: I think I should like Pom-pom.

MRS. OTTO: They spend their time picking holes in me to Otto till I feel a perfect sieve. And they've got the strongest sense of other people's duty that I've ever come across.

EMILY: What have they been doing now?

MRS. OTTO: Their idea of a jolly life is that I should spend the whole day by baby's cradle, and just run out in the morning to do the housekeeping. But, as I tell Otto, what on earth have we got eight servants for? [*To ROSE.*] We've just got a new second footman, darling, and he's six foot four. I'm so proud of him.

ROSE: My dear, I wish you'd realise that one doesn't talk of one's second footman unless one's in love with him.

DALLAS-BAKER: And even then it's slightly indiscreet.

ALGY: Do tell me more about your sisters-in-law.

MRS. OTTO: Well, of course, they're Jewesses, but Jews aren't so bad really when you get to know them, and they've got thirty thousand pounds apiece.

EMILY: [*With a smile.*] That sounds rather a chance, Tom.

FREEMAN: Doesn't it?

ROSE: If we want to play bridge we really ought not to waste any more time.

MRS. OTTO: [*To DALLAS-BAKER.*] But aren't you going to play?

DALLAS-BAKER: [*Taking out his watch.*] No, I must go in ten minutes. I shall just wait to see you started.

ROSE: I shall be thankful when you go, Herbert. It does bore me to see you take out your watch every other minute.

ALGY: You're so restless, Herbert, and we only married you because we liked your stolidity.

DALLAS-BAKER: [*Laughing.*] Upon my soul, I don't know what things are coming to.

[Meanwhile the players have been cutting for partners.]

EMILY: You and I, Algy.

[The telephone bell is heard ringing.]

ROSE: Oh, it is too exasperating. There's that wretched telephone again!

DALLAS-BAKER: I'll go, shall I?

ROSE: Yes, do. And afterwards you might take the receiver off.

DALLAS-BAKER: All right. *[As he is going SMITH comes in.]*

SMITH: [*To Mrs. OTTO.*] You're wanted on the telephone, ma'am.

MRS. OTTO: Oh, how tiresome! Have you said I'm here?

SMITH: Yes, ma'am.

ROSE: That's too stupid of you, Smith. You should always say you'll inquire.

MRS. OTTO: Well, say I'm in the middle of a hand at bridge, and I can't possibly come. Ask them to give you the message.

SMITH: Very good, ma'am. *[Exit.]*

DALLAS-BAKER: [*Nervously.*] Rose.

ROSE: You seem to be in great demand, Cynthia. This is the third time you've been rung up here.

MRS. OTTO: I suppose Otto has got some foolish idea in his head. I oughtn't to have told him I was coming.

EMILY: If one wants to play cards in peace and quietness, it's

fatal to let anyone know one's whereabouts. They invariably ring you up when you're playing a very light no-trumper.

[SMITH comes in. *She is greatly distressed.*

SMITH: If you please, ma'am . . .

[*She stops, unable to go on.*

ROSE: What on earth's the matter with you, Smith?

ALGY: I bet a fiver Otto's eloped with the cook.

SMITH: It's Mr. Rosenberg, ma'am.

MRS. OTTO: Well?

SMITH: [*Trying to control herself.*] Oh, ma'am, I can't tell you.

ROSE: [*Sharply.*] Smith!

SMITH: You must go at once, ma'am. It's—it's the baby.

MRS. OTTO: I suppose Otto's in one of his states again. Say I'll come as soon as I've finished my hand.

SMITH: Oh, no, ma'am, please go at once. You mustn't go on. You really mustn't.

ROSE: What on earth are you talking about?

FREEMAN: What is it, Smith?

SMITH: Oh, sir, they said I was to break it to her.

FREEMAN: I dare say they thought it was my sister speaking. What is it?

SMITH: [*Almost in a whisper.*] It's dead, sir.

[*MRS. ROSENBERG gives a cry, but does not speak; she gets up, stares at the others for a moment in a dazed way, and goes out of the room. There is an interval of silence. For a moment ROSE is frightened. She stares in front of her, breathing quickly, with clenched hands.*

DALLAS-BAKER: I say, oughtn't I to go with her?

ROSE: [*Forcing the words out.*] No, let Algy go.

ALGY: All right, I don't mind. I say, what a bore, isn't it?

[*He goes out. ROSE follows him with her eyes.*

DALLAS-BAKER: We ought to have told her the child was ill, Rose.

[ROSE gives a slight start, as though the words were almost a blow. She turns sharply to SMITH.]

ROSE: What are you waiting for, Smith?

SMITH: Oh, ma'am, isn't it dreadful?

ROSE: [*Violently.*] For goodness' sake, go.

SMITH: I beg your pardon, ma'am. [*She goes out.*]

ROSE: [*Trying to regain her usual manner.*] I like Smith's idea of breaking it gently.

EMILY: She seemed quite upset, didn't she?

ROSE: [*Shrugging her shoulders.*] The lower classes love that sort of thing.

DALLAS-BAKER: I hope it won't lead to any unpleasantness, Rose.

ROSE: [*Trying to repress her exasperation.*] Oughtn't you to be going to your meeting?

DALLAS-BAKER: I suppose I ought. I'd quite forgotten it for the moment.

[*He hesitates for an instant, then goes out quickly.*]

FREEMAN: Did you know the child was ill, Rose?

ROSE: They rang up just before luncheon to ask if I knew where Cynthia was.

FREEMAN: But you did. I heard you say at breakfast that she was lunching at the Ritz.

ROSE: It's not my business to tell Otto where his wife is.

FREEMAN: If you had, she might have got home three hours ago.

ROSE: For goodness' sake, don't lecture me, Tom. I'm not in the mood to stand it.

FREEMAN: Rose, you didn't refuse to tell Rosenberg where his wife was so that your bridge party shouldn't be upset?

ROSE: Good heavens, you don't suppose I knew the child was dying. Otto was always getting into a state about its health. The whole thing's a beastly nuisance.

FREEMAN: [*Indignantly.*] Rose!

ROSE: Oh, for heaven's sake, leave me alone. You've done nothing but blame me for one thing or another ever since you came. I'm sick of it. If you're not satisfied you can go. There are surely enough hotels in London.

FREEMAN: Yes, that's the best thing I can do. I'm only a stranger to you. We speak a different language, you and I.

ROSE: I can only hope I don't speak such drivelling nonsense in mine as you do in yours. Oh, if you only knew how I loathed you! I loathe your priggishness, I loathe your strenuousness. How thankful I shall be when you go, and how I hope I shall never, never see you again!

FREEMAN: All right. You can easily be spared that. Of course I'll go.

[*With an angry snort* ROSE *flings out of the room.* FREEMAN *turns to* EMILY CHAPMAN.

FREEMAN: You've witnessed a very pretty domestic quarrel.

EMILY: When a single woman has reached my age, she's seen her fair share of them.

[*There is a very slight pause.* FREEMAN *gives a gesture of discouragement.*

FREEMAN: Rose is the only relation I have, and I came back fonder of her than I'd ever been before.

EMILY: My dear friend, that is the proverbial effect of absence on the human heart.

FREEMAN: I felt so lonely sometimes—so horribly lonely. I clothed her with all the qualities I want in a woman.

EMILY: Poor Rose! She was always a little over-dressed before.

FREEMAN: It was nothing very much. I only asked that she should be honest and truthful, a faithful wife and a good mother.

EMILY: [*After a long look at him, meditatively.*] No, I suppose it's not very much to ask. And yet . . .

FREEMAN: How could she be so wantonly cruel and selfish! The only person who seemed to care a damn was—Smith.

EMILY: Persons of that class are very easily moved.

FREEMAN: It's easy enough not to be moved if you have no heart.

EMILY: Honestly, do you care twopence if the child's alive or dead?

FREEMAN: Would it surprise you if I did?

EMILY: After all, you've never seen it.

FREEMAN: The world is such a jolly place, and life is so full and splendid. Think how hard that a child should be snatched away before it's enjoyed anything!

EMILY: Do you really think the world is a jolly place, and that life is splendid?

FREEMAN: Don't you?

EMILY: [*Unwilling to answer.*] It had been weakly from its birth.

FREEMAN: Even then it's the saddest thing in the world that a child should die.

EMILY: One often hears elderly spinsters say that sort of thing, but it sounds odd in your mouth.

FREEMAN: I'm afraid you think me very ridiculous.

EMILY: Not exactly ridiculous. I think you a little unusual.

FREEMAN: I've had a very rough time, and the world has knocked me about a bit. Of course, *I* think it's knocked the nonsense out of me. I only want very simple things now.

EMILY: Like simple clothes, I'm afraid they cost a great deal of money.

FREEMAN: [*With a smile.*] No. I want no more than a roof over my head and decent food to eat, and a wife and children. That oughtn't to be very hard to get if you're willing to work for it. And for beauty, I don't want much more than the sunrise and the sunset and the stars of heaven. And I'd like my own people to be fond of me. [*Dropping his voice.*] And for that I don't mind putting up with rotten weather, and bad times, and disease, and separation, and death . . . and I'll call it all good.

[*There is a pause. EMILY walks a little away from him. She is greatly troubled by what he has said.*]

EMILY: [*Huskyly.*] You asked me to marry you yesterday, Tom.

FREEMAN: [*With a laugh.*] Good heavens, I've not forgotten

EMILY: Did you ask me because you thought I should be honest and truthful, a faithful wife and a good mother?

FREEMAN: Yes.

[*EMILY struggles with herself for a moment. An expression of anguish passes over her face.*]

EMILY: I think I should tell you that since you went away I've been engaged twice.

FREEMAN: I know.

EMILY: [*Startled.*] How?

FREEMAN: Rose told me the first day I came, I think.

EMILY: [*Bitterly.*] I might have known it.

FREEMAN: Why do you tell me now?

EMILY: Why? [*She breaks out with vehement passion.*] Then why did you ask me to marry you? You knew it wasn't true when I gave you to understand that I'd loved you all the time.

FREEMAN: I should have been very vain to expect it.

EMILY: You knew I was only trying to make you sorry for me.

FREEMAN: I was sorry for you, even though I didn't quite believe all you said to me.

EMILY: Why?

FREEMAN: I think sometimes it's possible for a woman to tell the truth with her soul while she's telling lies with her lips.

EMILY: I don't know what you mean.

FREEMAN: I believe in your heart.

EMILY: Even when you know that I deliberately set about to entrap you?

FREEMAN: [*Smiling.*] Even then.

EMILY: But why should you be willing to marry me?

FREEMAN: Because I think we shall both be very happy.

EMILY: [*With anguish.*] I never expect to be happy.

FREEMAN: You know, I believe awfully in the life that I'm going to take you to. It's a hard life rather, but it has its points, and I think in a very little while the—the sordidness and the meanness fall away from one.

EMILY: [*Bitterly.*] You don't know me, Tom. I'm too old to change now.

FREEMAN: I've learnt to ask jolly little of people.

EMILY: D'you know why I was so desperately anxious to marry you? I've got three hundred pounds worth of debts, and writs out against me, and I haven't a farthing. The mere announcement of my engagement is enough to set me free for the moment. My dressmaker is willing to lend me the money till I'm married.

FREEMAN: Well, now she won't have to. I can manage that on my head.

EMILY: Have you no reproaches for me?

FREEMAN: [*With a laugh.*] I'm rather glad you've made a clean

breast of it. Now we can start afresh, and we won't talk of it again.

EMILY: What should I do on a Rhodesian farm? The only talent I have is for playing bridge.

FREEMAN: [*Smiling.*] You'll be able to beat me at double dummy in the evening.

EMILY: Two years ago I would never have dreamt of marrying you. When I grew desperate and thought it would be easy to marry you, I made up my mind to come back to England as soon as I could. I didn't think it would be difficult to invent excuses for not going back.

FREEMAN: [*Gently.*] Perhaps you might grow to care for me, and then you wouldn't mind staying where I was.

EMILY: If? There's no possibility of love for me any more. All the love I'm capable of was wasted years ago.

FREEMAN: [*Holding out his hands.*] Let us risk it at all events.

EMILY: [*Desperately warding him off, as if she were fighting for her life.*] No, Tom, I tell you I can't, I can't, I can't.

FREEMAN: Why not?

EMILY: [*Vehemently.*] There's something in me that I didn't know. I don't understand. I wanted it so much, and now . . . I haven't a spark of love in my heart for you. It mightn't be so difficult if you loved me, but you don't, do you? Honestly? Real love, I mean.

FREEMAN: It may come.

EMILY: I should be ashamed to be your wife. . . . In this last fortnight that we've seen one another every day, I've got to know you as I never knew you before. You've grown to be very simple. I laughed up my sleeve at you, and yet somehow I couldn't help . . . [*She leaves the last words "respecting you" unsaid, and expresses them with a gesture.*] You haven't deserved that I should make you unhappy. I can't treat you like that. You've been a perfect brick to me, and I won't be such a cad.

FREEMAN: You know you're talking rather rot, aren't you?

EMILY: I can't marry you, not only for your sake, but for mine. It would be—indecent.

FREEMAN: [*Gravely.*] Then what will you do?

EMILY: I will go my own way and perhaps [*with a sob in her voice*] it'll be a better way because you've been very kind to me. [*She suddenly changes her manner and assumes a certain whimsical brightness.*] Come, we've been ranting horribly, you and I; I'm sure we've been making ourselves perfectly ridiculous.

FREEMAN: [*With a smile.*] It seems to me that I shall have to go back to Africa without a wife after all.

EMILY: [*Very tenderly.*] Oh, I hope not. I hope you'll take a good helpful woman out with you, who'll give you all you want, and will love the life you love. And I should like her to be very simple and unspoilt.

FREEMAN: But, my dear, where the dickens am I to find such a paragon?

[*She looks at him for a moment quizzically, and then, with a smile on her lips, addresses him.*]

EMILY: Why don't you marry Smith? I think she'd suit you uncommonly well.

FREEMAN: D'you think she'd have me?

EMILY: [*Smiling.*] Why don't you ask her?

FREEMAN: [*In a matter-of-fact tone.*] I think I will.

EMILY: Unfortunately you're a gentleman, and you couldn't very well marry a servant.

FREEMAN: Why on earth not? When you're thirty miles from anywhere people are not gentlemen and ladies, but men and women. And sometimes beasts.

EMILY: Then there's only the trifling impediment that you're not in love with her.

FREEMAN: If you put a strong healthy man and a strong healthy woman together, love will come.

EMILY: [*Ironically*] Will it?

FREEMAN: I promise to love anyone who's not absolutely plain, and has a good temper and a good appetite.

EMILY: [*Laughing*.] You foolish creature!

FREEMAN: I say, what about your three hundred pounds?

EMILY: I fortunately have my dressmaker's cheque. I've just got her a new customer, so she won't be more than rather disagreeable when she hears my fourth engagement is broken off.

[FREEMAN seeing EMILY go towards the door, rings the bell.]

EMILY: What are you ringing for?

FREEMAN: I thought you were going.

EMILY: [*Chaffing him*.] Are you so anxious to get rid of me?

FREEMAN: Of course not.

EMILY: I was going to see Rose. It would be fatal if she turned you out of the house just now.

FREEMAN: [*Smiling*.] Why? It was bound to come, you know.

EMILY: How could you prosecute your siege of Smith's young heart?

FREEMAN: You think I'm joking, but I'm not.

EMILY: Then I'll certainly go and appease her. I have a peculiar knack for persuading people who've had a row that each was in the right and neither meant a single word he said.

FREEMAN: You can safely tell Rose that I'm awfully sorry if I offended her.

[EMILY goes out. In a moment SMITH comes in and stands as if awaiting an order.]

FREEMAN: Yes?

SMITH: Did you ring, sir?

FREEMAN: No!

SMITH: The drawing-room indicator went up, sir.

FREEMAN: I lie in my throat. I rang by mistake. I thought Miss Chapman was going away. I'm sorry.

SMITH: Very good, sir. *[She turns to go.]*

FREEMAN: I wonder if you'd bring me a small drink.

SMITH: Yes, sir. What would you like, sir?

FREEMAN: I think a little drop of whisky and soda would exactly fit the case.

SMITH: Very good, sir.

[She goes out. FREEMAN looks at her as she goes and smiles to himself. He goes to a side table and takes from it a plan of his farm. He is thinking of EMILY CHAPMAN's suggestion. SMITH returns with whisky and a syphon.]

FREEMAN: Thank you. *[SMITH goes towards the door.]* What are you doing now?

SMITH: I was just going to decant the wine for dinner, sir.

FREEMAN: Oh, yes. . . . I see you've been having a great game with my clothes.

SMITH: Me, sir?

FREEMAN: You've marked every confounded thing I've got with a large T. F.

SMITH: I'm sorry, sir. I thought . . .

FREEMAN: *[Interrupting.]* Oh, I don't mind; but it would be very awkward if I'd committed a murder and were trying to conceal my identity.

SMITH: *[With the shadow of a smile.]* Well, sir, there are more people in the world who don't commit murders than people who do, and I thought you might be one of them.

FREEMAN: It's awfully jolly of you to have put my things in such good order.

SMITH: I think I've done everything now, sir. Wherever you go, no one'll be able to say you're not decent.

FREEMAN: That's a very nice thing to be, isn't it?

SMITH: Some people like going about in rags.

FREEMAN: You see, at home I haven't got anyone to look after me.

SMITH: Haven't you got a woman in the house at all, sir?

FREEMAN: Nothing to speak of.

SMITH: It must be in a state.

FREEMAN: [*Smiling.*] I don't know about that.

SMITH: I always say that a farm wants a mistress. There's something to do from morning till night, and a man can't do half what a woman can.

FREEMAN: That's a matter of opinion. . . . Would you like to look at my farm?

SMITH: Yes, sir, I should.

[He spreads out the plan, and she looks at it blankly.]

FREEMAN: Well?

SMITH: I thought you'd got some photographs, sir. I don't know what all that means.

FREEMAN: I expect you're one of those farmer's daughters who can just about tell a cow from a haystack and that's all.

SMITH: Well, sir, I can't see a cow or a haystack there, only red squares and green squares.

FREEMAN: Now, look here, that's corn, and that's pasture. And there's the river, running right through it. It's worth a pot of money, that river. And look, that little blue square there—that's my house, and not half a bad house, either.

SMITH: I shouldn't like to look in the corners. I expect there's a lot of dust and dirt in them.

FREEMAN: Hulloo, why are you blushing?

SMITH: I'm not blushing. But it makes me uncomfortable when you stare at me.

FREEMAN: [*Suddenly.*] What's your health like?

SMITH: My health? I never think about it.

FREEMAN: That looks as if you hadn't much to complain about.

SMITH: Servants can't afford to make a fuss every time they have a finger-ache.

FREEMAN: Ever ill in bed?

SMITH: Not since I was quite a little dot, sir.

FREEMAN: Can you cook?

SMITH: You do ask me funny questions.

FREEMAN: Not at all. It's a very reasonable question. If you're thinking of going to New South Wales, it's most important that you should be able to cook. What d'you think would be the ~~use~~ of your having a good hand with silver there?

SMITH: Was the dinner you had on Friday all right, sir?

FREEMAN: I quite forget.

SMITH: I expect it was, or else you'd have noticed it. Men are always the same. If things go right they don't notice anything, but if there's the smallest thing wrong they grumble for a week.

FREEMAN: What about the dinner on Friday?

SMITH: Well, sir, Cook had one of her sick headaches, and I did it.

FREEMAN: [*Quickly.*] You don't have sick headaches, do you?

SMITH: [*Laughing.*] Me, sir? I've never had a headache in my life.

FREEMAN: I dare say you can do fal-lals . . . [*Catching sight of her puzzled look.*] I was going back to Friday's dinner.

SMITH: You do jump about so, sir.

FREEMAN: But can you do good honest English cooking?

SMITH: When mother wasn't well I cooked for thirteen at home often and often.

FREEMAN: Were you happy at home?

SMITH: Oh, yes, sir. I like a farm. I wouldn't ever have come away if there hadn't been so many of us.

FREEMAN: [*Making up his mind.*] I don't know why you're particularly struck on New South Wales?

SMITH: Well, you see, I've got my sister there, sir, and it's nice to have someone belonging to you when you go to a strange country.

FREEMAN: I wonder if you'd like Rhodesia. A jolly climate, and the country's coming on like anything. You'd be very useful on my farm.

SMITH: [*Smiling.*] Well, sir, I couldn't very well come to you when there's no lady in the house, could I?

[*A pause. SMITH takes the empty glass and puts it on the salver. She takes up the salver.*]

SMITH: Shall I take the whisky away, sir?

FREEMAN: [*In a matter-of-fact way.*] Will you marry me?

SMITH: [*Smiling, as if it were a broad joke.*] Me, sir?

FREEMAN: You, Smith. By the way, what is your name?

SMITH: Smith, sir.

FREEMAN: I meant your Christian name.

SMITH: [*Quietly putting him in his place.*] I prefer to be called Smith, sir.

FREEMAN: Why?

SMITH: In the houses I've been used to the servants are always called by their surnames, sir, except the footmen.

[*SMITH, as she says this, goes towards the door. FREEMAN intercepts her, not in a marked way, but as if it were accidental.*]

FREEMAN: Where are you going?

SMITH: I was going to decant the claret, sir. The master likes it to stand before dinner.

FREEMAN: [*Politely.*] Has it slipped your memory that I asked you a question?

SMITH: You're only laughing at me, sir.

FREEMAN: I beg your pardon, I'm doing nothing of the kind. [*Noticing her look.*] What's the matter now?

SMITH: I was wondering how I was going to get through that door with you standing in front of it.

FREEMAN: I'm certainly not going to let you out of the room till you've answered me. Hang it all, you don't get a proposal of marriage every day. You might give it your serious attention.

SMITH: Thank you very much, sir, but I don't think it would do.

FREEMAN: Why not?

SMITH: [*Putting down the tray.*] Well, sir, for one thing, I'm a domestic servant, and you're a gentleman.

FREEMAN: Oh no, I'm not. I've long given up that delusion.

SMITH: That's what you say, sir.

FREEMAN: I was a gentleman. I hunted, and I bought my clothes in Savile Row, and I belonged to three clubs, and I used to have supper at the Savoy with chorus girls. But I'm not a gentleman now.

SMITH: Oh, yes, you are, sir. I knew it the moment I saw you.

FREEMAN: Don't be so disagreeable. I ought to know. And I wish you wouldn't call me sir every other minute. It does put me off when I'm making a proposal of marriage.

SMITH: I think I know my place, sir.

FREEMAN: [*Smiling.*] I suppose you think I've forgotten mine?

SMITH: It's not for me to say, sir.

FREEMAN: Well, that shows I'm not a gentleman.

SMITH: I don't hold with people marrying out of their proper station. I've never seen any good come of it.

FREEMAN: I wish you wouldn't make general reflections.
What I want is a straightforward answer.

SMITH: I thought I gave it to you, sir.

FREEMAN: It wasn't the right one. I think you'd better try again. . . . Come, my dear, don't let us talk nonsense. You'll make me a very good wife, and I'll try to make you a very good husband. I've got a comfortable home to take you to, and you'll be your own mistress, which is much better than being in service.

SMITH: That's what Fletcher said yesterday.

FREEMAN: Who the dickens is Fletcher?

SMITH: He's the porter, sir.

FREEMAN: Has he been making you a proposal of marriage?

SMITH: Yes, sir.

FREEMAN: Well, I'm hanged. And what did you say to him?

SMITH: I didn't say yes, and I didn't say no.

FREEMAN: You're keeping him dangling?

SMITH: I can't make up my mind.

FREEMAN: You made up your mind about me jolly quick.

SMITH: Oh, well, sir, you're different. He's very much more suitable.

FREEMAN: That's flattering.

SMITH: I don't mean it rudely, sir, but I want to marry a working-man.

FREEMAN: [*With humorous indignation.*] God bless my soul, what do you suppose I am? I bet you I do more work in a day than half a dozen Fletchers in a week.

SMITH: [*Calmly.*] Brain work, I don't count that.

FREEMAN: Not a bit of it; manual labour, my child.

SMITH: Oh, I know what gentlemen call manual labour—looking on while people they pay wages to do the work.

FREEMAN: [*With a laugh.*] You know, I shall slap you in a minute.

SMITH: Well, sir, I've seen gentlemen farmers at work. You know what we say about them down our way? Neither gentlemen nor farmers.

FREEMAN: That's very kind of you, I'm sure.

SMITH: I didn't mean it to apply to you, sir.

FREEMAN: Now look here, what is it you want in a husband?

SMITH: Me, sir?

FREEMAN: I suppose you know.

SMITH: Well, I wouldn't have a lazy man.

FREEMAN: Please note that I'm up a good hour before anybody in this house.

SMITH: I don't say you're not an early riser.

FREEMAN: [*With satisfaction.*] H'm.

SMITH: [*So that he shouldn't look upon the admission as encouragement.*] And a rare bother it is when I want to do the drawing-room and find you sitting in it at half-past seven every morning.

FREEMAN: What else?

SMITH: Well, I want a man who's got a strong pair of arms. The way I look on it is this. One never knows what's going to happen. A man may be thrown out of work, but if he's not above putting his hand to anything, and he's got a strong pair of arms, he won't starve in England or anywhere else.

FREEMAN: Feel my muscle.

SMITH: Oh yes, gentleman's strength, I know that.

FREEMAN: Do you?

SMITH: It's all very well for playing games with, but when it comes to carrying a heavy box up five flights of stairs . . .

FREEMAN: [*Interrupting.*] My dear child, I was luggage porter for six months in the best hotel in Johannesburg.

SMITH: [*Astonished.*] You, sir?

FREEMAN: That's one in the eye for Fletcher, isn't it?

SMITH: [*Bridling a little.*] Fletcher's very wiry and willing. He says he can bend an iron bar with his hands, and I shouldn't be surprised if it was true.

FREEMAN: I would. Besides, I don't see much good in being able to bend an iron bar with one's hands.

SMITH: Neither do I, sir, but it looks well.

FREEMAN: [*Shaking his head.*] Too showy for my taste.

[*SMITH gives a little laugh. Then she looks up at him shyly.*]

SMITH: You won't take it amiss my having said no to you, sir?

FREEMAN: Not a bit. It's the fortune of war.

SMITH: But one has to think of oneself in these matters, doesn't one?

FREEMAN: I do personally.

SMITH: And now, if you please, sir, may I go and decant the wine for dinner?

FREEMAN: You may. [*As she is going.*] Won't you give me a kiss?

[*She hesitates for a moment and smiles quietly.*]

SMITH: If it'll give you any pleasure, sir.

FREEMAN: Upon my word, you're such a sensible girl, it quite takes my breath away. Anyone else would have made no end of a fuss about it.

SMITH: Oh, well, sir, what I always says is, no great harm's done by a kiss.

FREEMAN: That all depends. [*FREEMAN goes towards her and she puts out her cheek to him. He kisses it. She gives a little restrained smile and goes out.*] Well, I'm dashed.

[*ALGY comes in, with his hat on the back of his head.*]

ALGY: Hulloo, where's Rose?

FREEMAN: I think she's in her room with Miss Chapman.

ALGY: Oh! [*He goes to the door and calls.*] I say, Smith, tell Mrs. Dallas-Baker I'm here. [*He shuts the door.*] I am a hero. Upon my soul, I am. Did you see how I flung myself into the breach and accompanied the weepin' mother to the bedside of her dead chiyld?

FREEMAN: [*Good-humouredly.*] Wretched creature!

ALGY: I suppose you've been havin' hysterics?

FREEMAN: I averted that catastrophe by the application of a small whisky and soda.

[*ROSE comes in with EMILY.*]

ROSE: Well?

ALGY: Well, I took her home.

EMILY: Was she much upset?

ALGY: She seemed a bit put out, don't you think. She kept on saying, what will Otto say?

ROSE: Silly little fool, she's frightened to death of Otto.

ALGY: I suppose he'll make a regular fuss about it?

ROSE: He's dreadfully common, you know.

FREEMAN: It'll be very vulgar of him if he's annoyed at his baby's death, won't it?

[*SMITH comes in.*]

SMITH: If you please, ma'am, I can't draw the cork of the claret the master put out for dinner.

ROSE: You'd better ask Fletcher to do it.

SMITH: He was in the kitchen, ma'am; he's tried already.

FREEMAN: I thought he was a sort of young Hercules. D'you mean to say Fletcher can't draw a cork?

SMITH: [*Rather condescendingly.*] Well, sir, if he can't draw it, nobody can.

FREEMAN: Bring the bottle and let me have a shot.

SMITH: Very good, sir.

[*She goes out.*]

EMILY: I'm going to say good-bye to you.

ROSE: Good-bye, dear. Please forgive these domestic details.

EMILY: Smith looks upon me as one of the family.

ROSE: I'm afraid our bridge hasn't been a great success to-day.

EMILY: [*Shaking hands with FREEMAN.*] Good-bye, and good luck.

ALGY: What are you wishing him good luck in?

EMILY: [*With a smile.*] His matrimonial schemes.

FREEMAN: Like those of mice and men, they gang oft agley.

ALGY: My dear fellow, don't talk Scotch to us. . . . You should take my advice and put an advertisement in the *Telegraph*.

FREEMAN: I'm beginning to think I shall be driven to it.

[*SMITH comes back with a bottle of claret: there is a corkscrew in the neck.*

SMITH: Fletcher's had another try, sir, and he can't move it.

FREEMAN: Fletcher's a donkey.

[*He takes the bottle and pulls the corkscrew. He stops and takes a long breath.*

SMITH: [*Quietly chaffing him.*] I'm afraid you'll strain yourself, sir.

FREEMAN: Shut up!

[*He pulls again, and this time he slowly draws out the cork. He hands the bottle back to SMITH with a quizzical look. She smiles slightly as she takes it and looks down.*

ALGY: Upon my soul, you are a strong beast.

[*FREEMAN slowly takes the corkscrew out of the cork and hands the cork to SMITH.*

FREEMAN: You can give the cork to Fletcher with my compliments, and perhaps he'd like to wear it on his watch-chain.

THE FOURTH ACT

THE SCENE is the same as in the preceding Act.

FREEMAN is lounging in an arm-chair, with a book in his hand
SMITH enters with a tray on which are half a dozen vases of flowers. He gives her a glance as she comes in, then goes on reading. Having put the vases in various places, she stands in the middle of the room to survey them, then changes one or two of them.

FREEMAN: [*With a slight smile.*] They were all right before, you know.

SMITH: [*Gives a little start.*] You did give me a start. I thought you was reading, sir.

FREEMAN: When you came in I suddenly discovered I had something better to do. [*SMITH does not answer.*] It may interest you to know that I'm going away next week.

SMITH: We shall be sorry to lose you, sir.

FREEMAN: I can't flatter myself that it'll disturb your night's rest.

SMITH: It would want a lot to do that. [*She waits for him to reply, but as he takes up his book she moves towards the door.*] Is there anything else, sir?

FREEMAN: [*Looking up.*] Nothing, thank you.

SMITH: [*Hesitating.*] Excuse me, sir.

FREEMAN: Yes?

SMITH: I—I want to thank you for being so kind to me, sir.

FREEMAN: That's very good of you. I've not noticed that I've been kind.

SMITH: Many gentlemen would have taken advantage of—of what you said last week to be familiar.

FREEMAN: I could hardly look upon it as encouragement when you refused to marry me.

SMITH: Or you might have been very short with me. I know it's silly when you're in a situation, but I don't like it when people talk to you as if you was a dog.

FREEMAN: [*Smiling.*] Now you're being idiotic. You'd better get on with your work.

SMITH: Yes, sir.

FREEMAN: It never struck me it might be rather uncomfortable for you here afterwards.

SMITH: Cook said she thought I ought to give notice.

FREEMAN: Oh, have you discussed it with Cook?

SMITH: You don't mind, sir, do you?

FREEMAN: Not a bit. You can discuss it with the dustman if you like.

SMITH: Well, sir, mother asked Cook to keep an eye on me, so I thought I'd better tell her what you'd said. Though the fact is, I keep more of an eye on her.

FREEMAN: [*Amused.*] Do you?

SMITH: It seems to me that single women when they get near forty always become rather silly about men.

FREEMAN: [*With a chuckle.*] And what did you say to Cook when she advised you to leave?

SMITH: Well, I said I didn't know how she'd get on without me.

FREEMAN: I see that you have a proper opinion of yourself.

SMITH: It's not everyone as could get on with Cook, sir, so I thought I'd wait and see.

FREEMAN: I hope I haven't made myself very objectionable.

SMITH: No, sir. You've been just the same as you was before. Except you used to chat a little with me now and then, and you've hardly said a word to me till to-day.

FREEMAN: I've thought a good deal.

SMITH: Have you, sir?

FREEMAN: I think you're a very good girl, and the man you marry will be a devilish lucky chap.

SMITH: Now you're laughing at me again, sir.

FREEMAN: No, I'm not. I fancy you'll keep him in order, but there's not much harm in that. I hope you'll be very happy.

SMITH: [*Blushing with pleasure.*] Thank you, sir.

FREEMAN: If you'll allow me to give you a little bit of advice, I wouldn't ask too much from life if I were you. Remember that you can't expect perfection from anyone, so make allowances for him now and then.

SMITH: One always has to do that with a man, doesn't one?

FREEMAN: [*Chuckling.*] And I hope he'll be as good to you as you deserve.

SMITH: [*With a smile.*] I hope he'll be better than that, sir.

FREEMAN: Well, don't let him know that such a thing is possible. [*A bell is heard.*]

SMITH: There's the front door.

FREEMAN: [*As she goes.*] I expect it's Mr. Peppercorn.

[SMITH goes out, and FREEMAN takes up his book and begins reading. SMITH enters to announce EMILY CHAPMAN. EMILY is dressed much more quietly than in the preceding Acts and wears no jewellery. She has left off her rouge and the black round her eyes, and looks a little pale in consequence. SMITH goes out after speaking.]

SMITH: Miss Chapman.

FREEMAN: [*Getting up and going to her cordially.*] You're quite a stranger.

EMILY: How do you do?

FREEMAN: It's at least a century since you were here.

EMILY: [*Smiling.*] A week and one day, to be precise.

FREEMAN: I'm afraid Rose is not in. Providence having sent us a wet Sunday, Rose thought she'd get even with Providence by taking Herbert to church.

EMILY: I came now because I thought I might catch you alone.

FREEMAN: [*Smiling.*] That's very flattering.

EMILY: I wanted to thank you.

FREEMAN: Good heavens, what for?

EMILY: It was good of you to send me that three hundred pounds the other day. I can't tell you how touched I was that you thought of it.

FREEMAN: Oh, nonsense!

EMILY: My first impulse was to return it, but then I thought that would be very silly and romantic. I wanted the money badly, and, after all, one has to let one's common sense triumph over one's finer feelings sometimes, doesn't one?

FREEMAN: [*Laughing.*] One does, indeed.

EMILY: I've paid my dressmaker. For the first time in my life I haven't a debt in the world.

FREEMAN: You must feel immensely relieved.

EMILY: Just at present I feel rather lonely.

FREEMAN: You'll get used to it.

EMILY: But I've done something else. I've sold everything I possessed, all my dresses—I fortunately had some rather decent lace—and every trinket I had. [*With a rapid smile.*] Even the ring you gave me ten years ago.

FREEMAN: [*Surprised.*] But why?

EMILY: I didn't want them any more. I'm going away.

FREEMAN: Are you?

EMILY: I've come to say good-bye to you all, and I wanted to tell you what I'm going to do, because you've had a good deal to do with it. I hope you won't think it's awfully silly of me.

FREEMAN: I have no doubt I shall.

EMILY: [*Lightly.*] You know, I really did rather a good action the other day when I refused to marry you because neither of us cared two straws for the other. . . . Don't you hug yourself night and day when you think you haven't got to pay with a lifetime's misery for giving way to a moment of emotion? Honestly?

FREEMAN: *What a monstrous question!*

EMILY: I don't know why I did it. It was something stronger than myself that just took me and made me. But it was madness. Good actions are like drug-taking; the first step may lead you goodness knows where.

FREEMAN: [*Comically.*] You fill me with consternation.

EMILY: I felt desperately virtuous afterwards, and I had a sleepless night or two, and I cried a good deal.

FREEMAN: I say, I'm awfully sorry.

EMILY: There's no need to be, because I was quite happy.

[She pauses and looks at him a little shyly; when she goes on it is without the gaiety of manner which she had before, but rather seriously.]

EMILY: I don't know what came over me. I suddenly felt so horribly worthless, and I hated the life I've been leading for the last ten years. I wonder if you realise what it means to be a penniless woman trying to keep up appearances. The humiliation you have to put up with from people richer than yourself, the snubs you have to accept with a smiling face!

FREEMAN: I expect you've had rather a rotten time.

EMILY: And the last two or three years it's been growing harder. People didn't mind asking a pretty girl to their houses, but they weren't so anxious to have a woman who was so notoriously looking for a husband. I've had to hunt for invitations, and I can't be so particular about whom I know. People are beginning to think I play

bridge too well. When I win they're already half inclined to suggest there's something fishy about it; in a little while they'll fight shy of playing with me. And heaven knows what else they're saying. I have to dress well. It's not me people ask to parties, but my frocks, and they want to know where the money comes from. Oh, it's hateful.

FREEMAN: It's not very nice.

EMILY: I looked at myself in the glass. I'm only thirty, and I'm a painted harridan already. What shall I be in ten years? . . . I could have killed myself then.

FREEMAN: I perceive you didn't.

EMILY: No, but I decided to make an end of it all the same. I've had enough of all that humiliation and all that beastliness. [*Gaily.*] I started by washing my face.

FREEMAN: As an economy or as a symbol?

EMILY: [*With a laugh.*] I thought there was no time to waste, and the only thing was to work for my living. I went to a hospital and tried to be taken on as a nurse. It's sufficiently commonplace, but it was the first thing that occurred to me.

FREEMAN: Well?

EMILY: The matron looked me up and down, and said I wasn't at all the sort of woman they wanted. Then I had another idea.

FREEMAN: You seem to be full of them.

EMILY: D'you remember telling me that Smith was thinking of emigrating to New South Wales? Well, I made inquiries.

FREEMAN: You?

EMILY: I've got a second-class ticket in my pocket, for which I haven't had to pay anything. I start for Sydney at once, and on my arrival I'm guaranteed a job at quite a decent salary.

FREEMAN: I think it's awfully brave of you.

EMILY: It isn't a bit. It's merely the least of quite a number of evils.

FREEMAN: [*Hearing the sound of an opening door.*] There are Rose and Herbert.

EMILY: You need not tell them what I'm going to do.

FREEMAN: I won't say a word.

[*ROSE and DALLAS-BAKER come in. He is more respectable than ever in his frock-coat. ROSE has a prayer-book in her hand.*]

ROSE: Oh, Emily, I've been wondering what on earth had become of you.

EMILY: [*Kissing her.*] I've been very busy.

ROSE: Is Algy not here?

FREEMAN: I've not seen him.

ROSE: How tiresome he is!

FREEMAN: I have no doubt he'll come in time for lunch.

ROSE: I'm beginning to think he's making too great a convenience of us.

[*FREEMAN raises his eyebrows and outlines a whistle with his lips. ROSE goes out impatiently.*]

DALLAS-BAKER: Rose isn't in a very good humour this morning. I wish Algy would come.

FREEMAN: [*Dryly.*] Do you?

DALLAS-BAKER: I hope he's not going to be late for luncheon. It always puts Rose out to be kept waiting.

FREEMAN: As it was raining and you couldn't play golf, I dare say he thought he'd take a day off.

[*ROSE comes back, without the prayer-book, having taken off her gloves.*]

ROSE: Will you stay to lunch, Emily?

EMILY: It's very kind of you, but I'm afraid I can't.

ROSE: Have you seen Cynthia Rosenberg lately?

EMILY: No, I called, but she wasn't at home.

ROSE: I'm very angry with her. I called twice, and I happen to know she was in each time, and they wouldn't let me up. I wrote and asked if I might go and see her, and she hasn't answered my letter.

DALLAS-BAKER: I dare say she was very much upset by the baby's death.

ROSE: Nonsense!

DALLAS-BAKER: I'm afraid she may think it was a little our fault that she didn't get home in time.

ROSE: Oh, Herbert, don't begin on that again. I think you're growing more and more prosy every day.

[ALGY PEPPERCORN comes in.

DALLAS-BAKER: [*Taking no notice of his entrance.*] I've been very much worried by the whole thing.

ROSE: My dear Herbert, it's ancient history now.

DALLAS-BAKER: The fact is, people might say very disagreeable things if they knew that . . .

ROSE: [*Interrupting.*] I'm quite indifferent to what people say about me.

ALGY: How lucky I am! I've arrived in the nick of time for a domestic tiff.

ROSE: You're very late, my friend.

ALGY: Am I?

ROSE: Don't you think you might at least pretend some regret?

ALGY: I precipitate myself at your feet and kiss the hem of your garment.

ROSE: I'm beginning to think you're growing stupid, Algy.

ALGY: I've noticed it for some time.

DALLAS-BAKER: What happened to you last night, young

man? It was too bad of you to telephone five minutes before dinner that you weren't able to come.

ROSE: I've been wondering when it would occur to you to apologise for putting us to inconvenience.

ALGY: [*Takes out his handkerchief and holds up a knotted corner.*] There. Look at that. I thought of a most convincing excuse as I came along, and so that I shouldn't forget it, I made a knot in my handkerchief. And now it's gone. I shall never trust to a knot in my handkerchief again.

[*SMITH enters to announce MRS. OTTO ROSENBERG, and then goes out. CYNTHIA is in mourning.*]

SMITH: Mrs. Rosenberg.

[*She stops short on coming into the room, and is evidently seized with nervousness.*]

ROSE: Cynthia.

MRS. OTTO: I didn't expect to find so many people. I thought as it was Sunday . . . [*She stops.*]

ROSE: [*Kissing her.*] What on earth's the matter? Why wouldn't you see me the other day when I called?

MRS. OTTO: [*Shaking hands with DALLAS-BAKER.*] How d'you do?

DALLAS-BAKER: I'm glad to have this opportunity of expressing my sympathy with your great loss.

ROSE: Really, Herbert.

MRS. OTTO: It's very kind of you. . . . I have something to say to you, Rose.

FREEMAN: Would you like us to leave you?

[*MRS. OTTO hesitates for an instant.*]

MRS. OTTO: No, don't bother.

FREEMAN: Won't you sit down?

MRS. OTTO: No, thank you, I can only stay a minute. You wrote to me the other day, Rose.

ROSE: I've been wondering why on earth you haven't answered.

MRS. OTTO: Otto wanted me to answer by letter, but I felt I couldn't. I thought I could explain so much better if I saw you. It's . . . it's very difficult.

ROSE: You're extraordinarily mysterious. I simply wrote to ask when I could come and see you. It was mere politeness.

[MRS. OTTO is seized again with nervousness; she pulls aimlessly at the braid of her dress.]

MRS. OTTO: I'm afraid I can't ask you to come and see me just yet. . . . You must forgive me.

ROSE: Why on earth not?

MRS. OTTO: [*Breaking out hysterically.*] Oh, I've had such an awful week. When I got home and the baby was dead, Otto was furious with me. He locked the nursery door and wouldn't let me go in. He'd never been angry with me before. I didn't know he could speak like that. He . . . Oh— [*She makes a motion to suggest that he hit her.*] I thought he was going to kill me.

ROSE: The brute.

MRS. OTTO: I—I didn't mind. I never knew . . . I . . . And he wouldn't speak to me. I had to go to Rachel and ask her to go to him. He said I'd married him for his money, and I was a worthless wife and a worthless mother.

ROSE: You oughtn't to have let him.

MRS. OTTO: It was true.

ROSE: Fortunately we don't live in a world where people habitually speak the truth.

MRS. OTTO: He talked of separating, and I was so horribly frightened. After all, he's the only person in the world who cares for me. And he was always so good to me, and he was always going out of his way to do things for me.

And I didn't know where I was to go to if he left me. It seemed to me the whole world was coming to an end.

ROSE: Because Otto Rosenberg suggested a separation?

MRS. OTTO: I suppose I cared for him more than I knew. . . . And at last he said that if I'd try to be more decent, he'd keep me. . . . And I promised to give up seeing you.

ROSE: Me?

MRS. OTTO: All of you. . . . The people I've been going about with. He thinks you're such—I don't quite know how to put it.

ROSE: My dear, you need not trouble to explain. We shall bear the loss of your society with fortitude.

MRS. OTTO: Don't be angry with me. I felt I *must* explain, so that you shouldn't think too badly of me. I'm afraid it applies to you also, Emily.

EMILY: [*Good-naturedly.*] Oh, my dear, don't be troubled about me. I couldn't have seen you much more in any case. I'm going away.

ROSE: You, Emily?

EMILY: Yes, I came to say good-bye to you to-day. I'm going to Australia. We shall never abuse one another again at bridge, Rose.

ROSE: That will at least be an advantage to my pocket.

MRS. OTTO: [*Timidly to ROSE.*] Good-bye.

ROSE: You can tell Otto with my compliments that . . .

FREEMAN: [*Interrupting.*] I wouldn't say anything disagreeable, Rose. [*To MRS. OTTO.*] I'm sorry I don't know your husband.

MRS. OTTO: You called him a fat old German Jew when you first came.

FREEMAN: I knew him much less than I do now. Good-bye.

MRS. OTTO: [*Turning to DALLAS-BAKER.*] Good-bye.

DALLAS-BAKER: [*Stiffly.*] Good-bye.

[*He opens the door for her and she goes out.*]

ROSE: [*with a little laugh.*] I never heard anything so vulgar and so absurd.

DALLAS-BAKER: I dare say we shall be able to do without her, my dear. I don't think either she or her husband was quite our form.

ROSE: [*Bitterly.*] We might have discovered that before they turned their backs on us.

DALLAS-BAKER: [*Taking out his watch.*] I've just got time to read a brief before luncheon. I shall go and put on a smoking-jacket. I think my frock-coat is growing a little tight for me.

EMILY: I'd better say good-bye to you before you go.

DALLAS-BAKER: Good-bye. I'm sure I hope you'll have a pleasant journey.

EMILY: Thank you very much. [*He goes out.*]

ALGY: You'll write and tell us all about the kangaroos, won't you?

EMILY: [*Smiling.*] I will. [*Turning to ROSE.*] Well, good-bye, dear.

ROSE: Are you going already?

EMILY: I'm afraid I must.

[*They kiss one another indifferently. ROSE touches the bell as EMILY shakes hands with ALGY.*]

ALGY: This is an affecting leave-taking, isn't it?

EMILY: Very.

[*FREEMAN has gone to the door and opens it. He shakes hands with EMILY.*]

FREEMAN: Good-bye, and good luck.

EMILY: [*Smiling, but with tears in her eyes.*] Good-bye.

[*She goes out, and FREEMAN shuts the door after her.*]

ROSE: You look quite heart-broken, Tom.

FREEMAN: Doesn't it move you a little to see the last of a friend that you've known all your life?

ROSE: She was getting quite impossible, you know. People were beginning to *fight shy* of her.

ALGY: Personally I much prefer new acquaintances to old friends.

ROSE: [*With a laugh.*] There is a sentiment to shock you, Tom.

FREEMAN: Oh, my dear Rose, you've all long ceased to shock me. I might as well be shocked by the marionettes in a child's theatre.

ALGY: Hulloo, what new wheeze is this?

FREEMAN: At first when I came home I was frankly horrified. I thought I'd fallen into a perfect sink of iniquity.

ROSE: How absurd!

FREEMAN: It took me some time to discover that you weren't real people at all. You're not men and women, but strange sexless creatures, without blood in your veins, and when one puts you face to face with life—[*Sbrugging his shoulders scornfully*—a parcel of young ladies painting the Alps in water-colour. You're too trifling to be wicked. Your only vice is cigarette-smoking, your only passion is bridge. You want nothing very much except to be amused, and boredom eats into your very bones. In yourselves you're perfectly unimportant, but England is full of people as flippant and frivolous and inane as yourselves.

ALGY: [*Looking at his watch.*] Lucky I haven't got a train to catch.

ROSE: My dear Tom, Emily Chapman cares as little for me as I care for her. It's absurd of you to lecture me like a schoolgirl because I don't have an attack of hysterics when she tells me she is going to Australia.

ALGY: I say, I wonder why the deuce she's going.

ROSE: I should think Tom could tell you more about it than anyone else.

FREEMAN: Why?

ROSE: I imagine she failed in inducing you to marry her, and she thought you were her last chance.

FREEMAN: It may interest you to know that I asked her to marry me.

ALGY: What fun? What did she say?

FREEMAN: She advised me to marry Smith.

ROSE: Smith?

ALGY: What a good ideal! Do offer her your hand and heart.

FREEMAN: I have.

ROSE: Tom!

FREEMAN: Pray don't excite yourself. She refused me.

ALGY: [*Laughing.*] What a joke!

ROSE: Why on earth did you do that?

FREEMAN: Because I think she'd make an admirable wife. She's the only woman I've seen since I came back who seems capable of being a good housekeeper and a decent mother. She's very simple, and she has a good heart, and she's honest and straightforward.

ROSE: Why did she refuse?

FREEMAN: I'm afraid she didn't think me good enough.

ROSE: Are you serious?

FREEMAN: Perfectly.

ALGY: It must have been rather a sell for you.

FREEMAN: It was rather.

[*ROSE goes to the bell and rings it. She keeps her finger on it. Her face becomes cold and hard.*]

FREEMAN: What are you ringing for?

ROSE: [*Frigidly.*] Surely I can ring the bell in my own house without accounting to you for it.

FREEMAN: You're not going to do anything beastly, Rose?
[SMITH comes in.]

ROSE: Smith, I wish you to leave to-morrow morning.

SMITH: [*Astounded.*] Me, ma'am?

FREEMAN: [*Indignantly.*] Rosel

[*These two speeches are said simultaneously.*]

ROSE: [*To FREEMAN.*] Please leave me alone. . . . [*To SMITH.*] I shall give you your month's money.

SMITH: What have I done, ma'am?

ROSE: I have no explanation to offer. I shall expect you to be ready at ten o'clock.

FREEMAN: [*In an undertone.*] Rose, you can't be such a beast.

ROSE: [*Vindictively.*] Surely I can dismiss my own servants if I wish to. [*To SMITH.*] You can go.

[SMITH tries to stifle a sob and silently leaves the room.]

FREEMAN: How can you be so cruel?

ROSE: Don't be absurd. How can you expect me to keep a servant that you've been making love to? It's too disgraceful. Every tenant in the flats knows by now that you've asked her to marry you. If you wanted to play those sorts of tricks you ought not to have come here. You've made me the laughing stock of the whole place.

[FREEMAN shrugs his shoulders, but does not answer. He goes to the window and looks out. ALGY looks from one to the other.]

ALGY: Well, I must be getting along.

ROSE: [*Turning on him.*] Aren't you lunching here?

ALGY: No, I'm afraid I can't. Didn't you know?

ROSE: [*With tight lips.*] I didn't.

ALGY: How stupid of mother! I told her to ring you up this morning and tell you.

ROSE: Where are you lunching?

ALGY: IP Oh, with Lady Whitstable.

ROSE: Lady Whitstable's out of town. I saw in the paper this morning that she's got a week-end party on the river.

ALGY: [*Unperturbed.*] Has she? That's rather awkward, isn't it?

ROSE: Tom, will you leave us? I want to talk to Algy alone.

FREEMAN: Certainly. [*He goes out.*]

ROSE: You've rather put your foot in it, haven't you?

ALGY: It shows the danger of snobbishness. If I'd said I was lunching with Mrs. Jones or Robinson you'd have been none the wiser.

ROSE: What are you hiding from me?

ALGY: IP

ROSE: Oh, don't pretend to be stupider than you are. I know you're hiding something from me. Something's the matter. Why did you tell me that lie?

ALGY: It was stupid of me. I'm lunching with some Americans called Trevor.

ROSE: I've never heard of them.

ALGY: They've managed, notwithstanding that, to exist, and even to amass a considerable fortune.

ROSE: [*Looking at him sharply.*] What d'you mean?

ALGY: If you want to know, I'm proposing to marry their young and lovely daughter.

ROSE: [*Quickly.*] Are you engaged to her?

ALGY: [*With a quiet smile.*] I am.

ROSE: How long has this been going on?

ALGY: I offered her my young affections at a dance the night before last.

ROSE: Why haven't you told me anything about it?

ALGY: The Trevors are making a tour round Europe and won't return to London till the late autumn. I thought there was no need to trouble you with my private affairs till then.

ROSE: I suppose you thought we mightn't be so ready to take you motoring with us in the summer if . . .

[She stops indignantly.]

ALGY: *[Blandly.]* If what?

ROSE: You liar.

ALGY: *[Raising his eyebrows.]* Because I keep to myself a perfectly private matter?

ROSE: Is she rich?

ALGY: On the contrary, for an American she's very poor. She has barely two thousand a year, poor thing. We shall have to be rigidly economical.

ROSE: *[Violently.]* Oh, don't laugh all the time.

ALGY: You know, upon my word, I don't see why you're taking it like this.

ROSE: How could you let me go on making all sorts of plans for the future? If you'd had any decent feeling at all you wouldn't have made such a fool of me.

ALGY: My dear Rose, women are very peculiar. We got on extremely well together, but you were just as little in love with me as I was with you. It would have bored you if I'd made love to you just as much as it would have bored me to do it. But I knew quite well that you didn't want me to make love to anyone else. You liked to think I was your property, and you were looking forward to the pleasure of giving me the chuck when you grew sick of me.

ROSE: *[Beginning to sob angrily.]* There's not a soul in the world who cares for me.

ALGY: My dear Rose, you're just going to do a very foolish

thing. Now that I'm engaged to somebody else you're going to persuade yourself that you're in love with me.

ROSE: How can you have the heart to sneer at me?

ALGY: I'm not sneering at you. I'm just pointing out how stupid it is to want a thing only when you can't get it.
[*He looks at his watch.*] I'm afraid I must go now. I suppose you'll be in to supper to-night.

ROSE: Nol

ALGY: What a bore! I shall have to sup with mother.

ROSE: You need not give yourself the trouble of coming here again. I've come to the conclusion that you bore me.

ALGY: Just as you like. But you see how wise I was to keep the happy news of my engagement locked in my own manly bosom.

ROSE: You'll be late for your party.

ALGY: [*Good-naturedly, holding out his hand.*] Good-bye. I'm sure you'll like my wife.

ROSE: You cad.

[*He gives a short laugh, shrugs his shoulders, and goes out. ROSE sinks into a chair and begins to cry. FREEMAN comes in.*]

FREEMAN: I heard Algy go. . . . Hulloo, what's the matter?

ROSE: He's gone—for good.

FREEMAN: [*Gravely, after a moment's pause.*] I don't think he's much loss.

ROSE: Emily's gone, and Cynthia won't see me, and now he's gone too. Why have they all left me at once? What have I done? I might be plague-stricken.

FREEMAN: [*Gravely.*] I think they left you because you never tried to make them your friends. You used them for your pleasure as they used you for theirs. It's very hard to make friends. It requires that one should give all

oneself without a thought of return. . . . But you might find it worth while.

ROSE: I despise them all.

FREEMAN: [*Very gently.*] You've got precious little out of life so far. Why don't you try a change? You've got a chance that you'll never have again.

[*ROSE looks away, hesitating; for a moment she wavers. Then she breaks out hysterically, with a kind of desperate courage.*]

ROSE: Can the Ethiopian change his skin? I'm not made like you, Tom. I must go on as I've begun. If a few acquaintances have left me I can make more. I'm not going to worry my head about them. [*She goes to the door and opens it.*] Herbert.

DALLAS-BAKER: Yes, my dear.

ROSE: Be quick. I want you. [*He comes in.*] Herbert, let's go and lunch at Prince's, you and I, shall we? We can't lunch in. We've had a catastrophe in the kitchen.

DALLAS-BAKER: Why, what's the matter with you?

ROSE: [*Hysterically.*] Nothing's the matter with me. But I'm bored. I want gaiety. I want the crowd, and the band, and the noise.

DALLAS-BAKER: Just as you like, my dear. But what about Tom?

FREEMAN: I shall go to my club. I've got to see a man there, and it'll be a good opportunity.

ROSE: We must hurry up. It's growing awfully late.

DALLAS-BAKER: I'll just go and change my coat. I shan't be a minute. [*He goes out.*]

ROSE: I *won't* be bored. I'm going to amuse myself. I want the crowd, and the band, and the gaiety. And afterwards we'll take a taxi and go down to Ranelagh.

[She stands trying to control herself, trying to keep back the stifled sobs that force themselves from her.]

DALLAS-BAKER comes in, having put on his frock-coat.

DALLAS-BAKER: Now I'm ready, my dear.

ROSE: Come on.

[They go out. The front door is heard to bang. A moment or two later FREEMAN takes a jar of flowers off the chimney-piece and drops it on the floor near a table. He smiles quietly to himself and rings the bell. SMITH appears.]

SMITH: *[Holding herself erect, trying to be very dignified.]* Did you ring, sir?

FREEMAN: *[With his tongue in his cheek.]* It's so stupid of me. I knocked a flower-glass over. Would you wipe up the water?

SMITH: Yes, sir.

[She takes a duster out of a drawer, goes down on her knees, and dries the carpet. She picks up the flowers and replaces them in the vase.]

FREEMAN: You've been crying.

SMITH: *[Rather sharply.]* No, I haven't, sir.

FREEMAN: I apologise. . . . Are you put out at leaving?

SMITH: No one's ever given me notice before, sir. I don't like being spoken to like a dog.

FREEMAN: I'm afraid it was my fault.

SMITH: I thought as much.

FREEMAN: I'm very sorry. It never occurred to me that my sister would take it in that way.

SMITH: Oh, it doesn't matter, sir. Cook said it was bound to come.

FREEMAN: Cook seems to be a confirmed pessimist.

SMITH: It won't take me long to find another place

FREEMAN: Why don't you go right away to your sister at Sydney? It's better than mouldering away in one place after another.

SMITH: I can't do that now, sir. I had a letter from her last week, saying she and her husband were coming home for a holiday.

FREEMAN: Oh! . . . Would you like to stay on here? I dare say my sister would . . .

SMITH: [*Interrupting.*] Thank you very much, sir, but I shouldn't like to stay in a place where I'd been given notice for no fault of my own.

FREEMAN: Sinful pride, I call that.

SMITH: I call it having a proper spirit.

FREEMAN: Then it seems to me that the only thing that remains is Fletcher.

SMITH: Thank you, it'll be a long time before I marry Fletcher.

FREEMAN: Oh?

SMITH: I've not spoken to him for a week.

FREEMAN: Well, you'll have all the more to say when you're married.

SMITH: I made up my mind, and told him I wouldn't.

FREEMAN: Why did you do that?

SMITH: [*Giving up the effort to be on her dignity, with a little chuckle.*] Well, sir, d'you remember that cork you drew?

FREEMAN: Of course I do. The young Hercules couldn't manage it, could he?

SMITH: Well, I told him if he couldn't draw a cork that a gentleman could draw, he must be a weak little thing.

FREEMAN: I don't think *that's* very logical. It only means that I'm a strong big one.

SMITH: I was only chaffing him, sir, but he got quite nasty about it, and one thing led to another; and at last, to

make a long story short, I told him he could take himself off. And last Wednesday he went out with the girl upstairs.

FREEMAN: Well, that's disposed of Fletcher, hasn't it?

SMITH: I never really liked him.

FREEMAN: It seems to me you're rather at a loose end. . . .
Why don't you change your mind and marry me?

SMITH: Thank you very much, sir; but when I say no, I mean no.

FREEMAN: I know you're very nice, but you can't be so different as all that from the rest of your sex.

SMITH: It wouldn't do, and there's an end of it.

FREEMAN: You can go home for a few days while I get a special licence. Then I'll come down and marry you, and we can start off immediately afterwards.

[SMITH does not answer. She smiles shyly and looks down. She is obviously wavering.]

FREEMAN: Have you any objection to me personally?

SMITH: [With a little smile.] No, sir, I can't say I have.

FREEMAN: You know, at first I asked you to marry me because I wanted a wife. Now I ask you to marry me because I want you.

SMITH: Cook was quite right. I ought to have left at once.

FREEMAN: Oh, damn Cook. [Seeing a look of surprise come on her face as she glances up at the chimney-piece.] What's the matter?

SMITH: I was wondering how you could have knocked them flowers off the table when I remember putting them on the mantelpiece.

FREEMAN: I didn't knock them over. I put them very carefully on the floor so that you should have the bother of clearing them up.

SMITH: [With a laugh.] You are a caution.

FREEMAN: Well?

SMITH: I must go and get my box packed.

FREEMAN: You're not going out of this room till you've given me at least one sensible reason why you won't marry me.

SMITH: Who's going to prevent me?

FREEMAN: I am.

SMITH: I should like to see you do it.

[She tries to pass him, but he catches hold of her wrists.]

FREEMAN: No, you don't.

SMITH: *[Beginning to get cross.]* Will you let me go?

FREEMAN: I will not.

SMITH: I refused you because you're a gentleman, and you can't get over that.

FREEMAN: But, my dear, no gentleman would ever raise his hand to a woman.

SMITH: *[With a laugh.]* You've got an answer to everything.

FREEMAN: So have you, but yours is never the right one.

SMITH: It seems there's no getting you to take no.

FREEMAN: Not such a fool.

SMITH: Then perhaps it'll be better if I make it yes.

FREEMAN: *[Taking her in his arms.]* You are a dear. Now tell me what your name is.

SMITH: Mary.

FREEMAN: How clever of you! That's just what I wanted it to be. Give me a kiss. *[He kisses her.]*

FREEMAN: Well?

SMITH: *[With a happy sigh.]* It's rather nice.

THE END

THE LAND OF PROMISE

A COMEDY

in Three Acts

CHARACTERS

NORAH MARSH
EDWARD MARSH
GERTRUDE MARSH
FRANK TAYLOR
REGINALD HORNBY
BENJAMIN TROTTER
SIDNEY SHARP
EMMA SHARP
JAMES WICKHAM
DOROTHY WICKHAM
AGNES PRINGLE
CLEMENT WYNNE
KATE

TIME: 1912.

THE LAND OF PROMISE

ACT I

SCENE: *The drawing-room at Miss Wickham's house in Tunbridge Wells. It is a room in which there is too much furniture. There are armchairs covered with faded chintz, little tables here and there, cabinets containing china, a great many photographs in silver frames, porcelain ornaments wherever there is a vacant space, Chippendale chairs and chairs from the Tottenham Court Road. There are flowers in vases and growing plants. The wall-paper has a pattern of enormous chrysanthemums, and on the walls are a large number of old-fashioned water-colours in gilt frames. There is one door, which leads into the hall; and a French window opens on to the garden. The window is decorated with white lace curtains. It is four o'clock in the afternoon. The sun is streaming through the drawn blinds. There is a wreath of white flowers in a cardboard box on one of the chairs. The door is opened by KATE, the parlourmaid. She is of respectable appearance, and of a decent age. She admits MISS PRINGLE. MISS PRINGLE is companion to a wealthy old lady in Tunbridge Wells. She is a woman of middle age, plainly dressed, thin and narrow of shoulders, with a weather-beaten, tired face and grey hair.*

KATE: I'll tell Miss Marsh you're here, Miss Pringle.

MISS PRINGLE: How is she to-day, Kate?

KATE: She's tired out, poor thing. She's lying down now. But I'm sure she'd like to see you, Miss.

MISS PRINGLE: I'm very glad she didn't go to the funeral.

KATE: Dr. Evans thought she'd better stay at home, Miss, and Mrs. Wickham said she'd only upset herself if she went.

MISS PRINGLE: I wonder how she stood it all those months, waiting on Miss Wickham hand and foot.

KATE: Miss Wickham wouldn't have a professional nurse. And you know what she was, Miss. . . . Miss Marsh slept in Miss Wickham's room, and the moment she fell asleep Miss Wickham would have her up because her pillow wanted shaking, or she was thirsty, or something.

MISS PRINGLE: I suppose she was very inconsiderate.

KATE: Inconsiderate isn't the word, Miss. I wouldn't be a lady's companion, not for anything. What they have to put up with!

MISS PRINGLE: Oh, well, everyone isn't like Miss Wickham. The lady I'm companion to, Mrs. Hubbard, is kindness itself.

KATE: That sounds like Miss Marsh coming downstairs.
[*She goes to the door and opens it.*] Miss Pringle is here, Miss.

[*NORAH comes in. She is a woman of twenty-eight, with a pleasant, honest face and a happy smile. She is gentle, with quiet manners, but she has a quick temper, under very good control, and a passionate nature which is hidden under a demure appearance. She is simply dressed in black.*

NORAH: I *am* glad to see you. I was hoping you'd be able to come here this afternoon.

MISS PRINGLE: Mrs. Hubbard has gone for a drive with somebody or other, and didn't want me.

[*They kiss one another. NORAH notices the wreath.*

NORAH: What's this?

KATE: It didn't arrive till after they'd started, Miss.

NORAH: I wonder whom it's from. [*She looks at a card which is attached to the wreath.*] "From Mrs. Alfred Vincent, with deepest regret for my dear Miss Wickham and heartiest sympathy for her sorrowing relatives."

KATE: Sorrowing relatives is good, Miss.

NORAH: [*Remonstrating.*] Kate . . . I think you'd better take it away.

KATE: What shall I do with it, Miss?

NORAH: I'm going to the cemetery a little later. I'll take it with me.

KATE: Very good, Miss.

[*KATE takes up the box and goes out.*]

MISS PRINGLE: You haven't been crying, Norah?

NORAH: [*With a little apologetic smile.*] Yes, I couldn't help it.

MISS PRINGLE: What on earth for?

NORAH: My dear, it's not unnatural.

MISS PRINGLE: Well, I don't want to say anything against her now she's dead and gone, poor thing, but Miss Wickham was the most detestable old woman I ever met.

NORAH: I don't suppose one can live all that time with anyone and not be a little sorry to part with them for ever. I was Miss Wickham's companion for ten years.

MISS PRINGLE: How you stood it! Exacting, domineering, disagreeable.

NORAH: Yes, I suppose she was. Because she paid me a salary she thought I wasn't a human being. I never saw anyone with such a bitter tongue. At first I used to cry every night when I went to bed because of the things she said to me. But I got used to them.

MISS PRINGLE: I wonder you didn't leave her. I would have.

NORAH: It's not easy to get posts as lady's companion.

MISS PRINGLE: That's true. They tell me the agents' books are full of people wanting situations. Before I went to Mrs. Hubbard I was out of one for nearly two years.

NORAH: It's not so bad for you. You can always go and stay with your brother.

MISS PRINGLE: You've got a brother too.

NORAH: Yes, but he's farming in Canada. He had all he could do to keep himself, he couldn't keep me too.

MISS PRINGLE: How is he doing now?

NORAH: Oh, he's doing very well. He's got a farm of his own. He wrote over a couple of years ago and told me he could always give me a home if I wanted one.

MISS PRINGLE: Canada's so far off.

NORAH: Not when you get there.

MISS PRINGLE: Why don't you draw the blinds?

NORAH: I thought I ought to wait till they come back from the funeral.

MISS PRINGLE: It must be a great relief to you now it's all over.

NORAH: Sometimes I can't realise it. These last few weeks I hardly got to bed at all, and when the end came I was utterly exhausted. For two days I could do nothing but sleep. Poor Miss Wickham. She did hate dying.

MISS PRINGLE: That's the extraordinary part of it. I believe you were really fond of her.

NORAH: D'you know that for nearly a year she would eat nothing but what I gave her with my own hands. And she liked me as much as she was capable of liking anybody.

MISS PRINGLE: That wasn't much.

NORAH: And then, I was so dreadfully sorry for her.

MISS PRINGLE: Good heavens!

NORAH: She'd been a hard and selfish woman all her life, and there was no one who cared for her. It seemed so dreadful to die like that and leave not a soul to regret one. Her nephew and his wife were just waiting for her death. It was dreadful. Each time they came down from London I saw them looking at her to see if she was any worse than when last they'd seen her.

MISS PRINGLE: Well, I thought her a horrid old woman, and I'm glad she's dead. And I hope she's left you well provided for.

NORAH: [*With a smile.*] Oh, I think she's done that. Two years ago when I nearly went away she said she'd left me enough to live upon.

MISS PRINGLE: You mean when that assistant of Dr. Evans wanted to marry you? I'm glad you wouldn't have him.

NORAH: He was very nice. But, of course, he wasn't a gentleman.

MISS PRINGLE: I shouldn't like to live with a man at all; I think they're horrid, but, of course, it would be impossible if he weren't a gentleman.

NORAH: [*With a twinkle in her eye.*] He came to see Miss Wickham, but she wouldn't have anything to do with him. First she said that she couldn't spare me, and then she said that I had a very bad temper.

MISS PRINGLE: I like *her* saying that.

NORAH: It's quite true. Every now and then I felt I couldn't put up with her any more. I forgot that I was dependent on her, and if she dismissed me I probably shouldn't be able to find another situation. and I just flew at her. I must say she was very nice about it; she used to look at me and grin, and, when it was all over, say: "My dear, when you marry, if your husband's a wise man, he'll use a big stick now and then."

MISS PRINGLE: Old cat.

NORAH: [*Smiling.*] I should like to see a man try.

MISS PRINGLE: How much d'you think she's left you?

NORAH: Well, of course, I don't know; the will is going to be read this afternoon when they come back from the funeral, but from what she said I believe about two hundred and fifty a year.

MISS PRINGLE: It's the least she could do. She's had the ten best years of your life.

NORAH: [*With a sigh of relief.*] I shall never be at anybody's beck and call again. I shall be able to get up when I like and go to bed when I like, go out when I choose, and come in when I choose.

MISS PRINGLE: [*Driily.*] You'll probably marry.

NORAH: Never.

MISS PRINGLE: Then what'll you do?

NORAH: I shall go to Italy, Florence, Rome. D'you think it's horrible of me, I'm so happy?

MISS PRINGLE: My dear child.

[*There is a sound of carriage wheels on the drive.*]

NORAH: There they are.

MISS PRINGLE: I'd better go, hadn't I?

NORAH: I'm afraid you must.

MISS PRINGLE: I do so want to know about the will. Can't I go up to your room and wait there?

NORAH: No, I'll tell you what, go and sit in the garden. They want to catch the four something back to London, and we can have a cosy little tea all by ourselves.

MISS PRINGLE: Very well. Oh, my dear, I'm so happy in your good luck.

NORAH: Take care.

[*MISS PRINGLE slips out into the garden, and a moment later MR. and MRS. WICKHAM enter the room. MRS. WICKHAM is a pretty young woman. She is dressed in black, but her gown is elegant and fashionable. JAMES WICKHAM is a clean-shaven, thin-faced man, with a baldish head. He is dressed in black and wears black kid gloves.*]

DOROTHY: [*Cheerfully.*] Ouf! Do put the blinds up, Miss

MARSH. We really needn't be depressed any more. Jim, if you love me, take those gloves off. They're perfectly revolting.

[NORAH goes to the window and draws up the blind.]

WICKHAM: Why, what's wrong with them? The fellow in the shop told me they were the right thing.

DOROTHY: I never saw anyone look quite so funereal as you do.

WICKHAM: Well, you didn't want me to get myself up as though I were going to a wedding, did you?

NORAH: Were there many people?

DOROTHY: Quite a lot. The sort of people who indulge in other people's funerals as a mild form of dissipation.

WICKHAM: [*Looking at his watch.*] I hope Wynne will look sharp. I don't want to miss that train.

DOROTHY: Who were all those stodgy old things who wrung your hand afterwards, Jim?

WICKHAM: I can't think. They made me feel such a fool.

DOROTHY: Oh, was that it? I saw you looking a perfect owl, and I thought you were giving a very bad imitation of restrained emotion.

WICKHAM: [*Remonstrating.*] Dorothy.

NORAH: Would you like some tea, Mrs. Wickham?

DOROTHY: Well, you might send some in so that it'll be ready when Mr. Wynne comes. [NORAH is just going to ring the bell, but MRS. WICKHAM stops her with a pleasant smile.] We'll ring for you, shall we? I daresay you've got one or two things you want to do now.

NORAH: Very good, Mrs. Wickham. [*She goes out.*]

WICKHAM: I say, Dorothy, you oughtn't to be facetious before Miss Marsh. She was extremely attached to Aunt Louisa.

DOROTHY: Oh, what nonsense! It's always a very good rule to judge people by oneself, and I'm positive she was just longing for the old lady to die.

WICKHAM: She was awfully upset at the end.

DOROTHY: Nerves! Men are so idiotic. They never understand that there are tears *and* tears. I cried myself, and heaven knows I didn't regret her death.

WICKHAM: My dear Dorothy, you oughtn't to say that.

DOROTHY: Why not? It's perfectly true. Aunt Louisa was a detestable person and no one would have stood her for a minute if she hadn't had money. I don't see any use in being a hypocrite now that it can't make any difference either way.

WICKHAM: [*Looking at his watch again.*] I wish Wynne would hurry up. It'll be beastly inconvenient if we miss that train.

DOROTHY: I don't trust Miss Marsh. She looks as if she knew what was in the will.

WICKHAM: I don't suppose she does. Aunt Louisa wasn't the sort of person to talk.

DOROTHY: I'm sure she knows she's been left something.

WICKHAM: Oh, well, I think she has a right to expect that. Aunt Louisa led her a dog's life.

DOROTHY: She had wages and a comfortable home. If she didn't like the place she could have left it. . . . After all it's family money. I don't think Aunt Louisa had the right to leave it to strangers.

WICKHAM: We oughtn't to complain if Miss Marsh gets a small annuity. Aunt Louisa promised her something of the sort when she had a chance of marrying a couple of years ago.

DOROTHY: Miss Marsh is quite young. It isn't as if she'd been here for thirty years.

WICKHAM: Well, I've got an idea that Aunt Louisa meant to leave her about two hundred and fifty a year.

DOROTHY: But what's the estate.

WICKHAM: About nineteen thousand pounds, I believe.

DOROTHY: Oh, it's absurd. It's a most unfair proportion. It makes all the difference to us. On that extra two hundred and fifty a year we could almost keep a car.

WICKHAM: My dear, be thankful if we get anything at all.

DOROTHY: [*Aghast.*] Jim! [*She stares at him.*] Jim, you don't think! Oh! That would be too horrible.

WICKHAM: Take care. [*The door opens and KATE brings in the tea-things. She puts them on a small table.*] How lucky it is we had a fine day, isn't it?

DOROTHY: Yes.

WICKHAM: It looks as if we were going to have a spell of fine weather.

DOROTHY: Yes.

WICKHAM: It's funny how often it rains for weddings.

DOROTHY: Very funny. [*KATE goes out.*] I've been counting on that money for years. I used to dream at night that I was reading a telegram with the news of Aunt Louisa's death. And I've thought of all we should be able to do when we got it. It'll make such a difference.

WICKHAM: You know what she was. She didn't care twopence for us. We ought to be prepared for the worst.

DOROTHY: D'you think she could have left everything to Miss Marsh?

WICKHAM: I shouldn't be surprised.

DOROTHY: We'll dispute the will. It's undue influence. I suspected Miss Marsh from the beginning. I hate her. Oh, why doesn't Wynne come?

[*There is a ring at the bell.*]

WICKHAM: Here he is, I expect

DOROTHY: The suspense is too awful.

WICKHAM: Pull yourself together, old girl. And I say, look a bit dismal. After all, we've just come from a funeral.

DOROTHY: Are we downhearted?

[KATE enters to announce MR. WYNNE.

KATE: Mr. Wynne.

[*He enters and she goes out and closes the door. MR. WYNNE, the late Miss Wickham's solicitor, is a tallish man with a bald head. He has the red cheeks and hearty manner of a man who plays in his spare time at being a country gentleman. He is dressed in mourning because he has been to Miss Wickham's funeral.*

WICKHAM: Hulloo!

WYNNE: [*Taking DOROTHY's hand rather solemnly.*] I didn't have an opportunity of shaking hands with you at the cemetery.

DOROTHY: [*Somewhat helplessly.*] How do you do?

WYNNE: Pray accept my sincerest sympathy on your great bereavement.

DOROTHY: Of course, the end was not entirely unexpected.

WYNNE: No, I know. But it must have been a great shock all the same.

WICKHAM: My wife was very much upset, but of course my poor aunt had suffered great pain, and we couldn't help looking upon it as a happy release.

WYNNE: How is Miss Marsh?

[*DOROTHY gives him a quick look, wondering whether there is anything behind the polite inquiry.*

DOROTHY: Oh, she's very well.

WYNNE: Her devotion to Miss Wickham was wonderful. Dr. Evans—he's my brother-in-law, you know—told me

no trained nurse could have been more competent. She was like a daughter to Miss Wickham.

DOROTHY: [*Rather coldly.*] I suppose we'd better send for her.

WICKHAM: Have you brought the . . . [*He stops in some embarrassment.*]

WYNNE: Yes, I have it in my pocket.

DOROTHY: I'll ring. [*She touches the bell.*]

WICKHAM: I expect Mr. Wynne would like a cup of tea, Dorothy.

DOROTHY: Oh, I'm so sorry, I quite forgot about it.

WYNNE: No, thank you very much. I never take tea.

[*He takes a long envelope out of his pocket, and from it the will. He smooths it out reflectively. DOROTHY gives the document a nervous glance. KATE comes in.*]

WICKHAM: Will you ask Miss Marsh to be good enough to come here.

KATE: Very good, sir. [*Exit.*]

DOROTHY: What is the time, Jim?

WICKHAM: [*Looking at his watch.*] Oh, there's no hurry. [*To WYNNE.*] We've got an important engagement in London this evening. We're very anxious not to miss the fast train.

DOROTHY: The train service is rotten.

WYNNE: The will is very short. It won't take me two minutes to read it.

DOROTHY: [*Nervous and impatient.*] What on earth is Miss Marsh doing?

WYNNE: How pretty the garden is looking now.

WICKHAM: [*Abruptly.*] Very.

WYNNE: Miss Wickham was always so interested in her garden.

DOROTHY: Yes.

WYNNE: My own tulips aren't so advanced as those.

WICKHAM: [*Irritably.*] Aren't they?

WYNNE: [*To DOROTHY.*] Are you interested in gardening?

DOROTHY: [*Hardly able to control her impatience.*] No. I hate it At last!

[*The door is opened and MISS MARSH comes in. WYNNE gets up.*

WYNNE: How d'you do, Miss Marsh?

NORAH: How d'you do?

WICKHAM: Will you have a cup of tea?

DOROTHY: [*All nerves.*] Jim, Miss Marsh would much prefer to have tea quietly after we're gone.

NORAH: [*With a faint smile.*] I won't have any tea, thank you.

DOROTHY: Mr. Wynne has brought the will with him.

NORAH: Oh, yes.

[*She sits down calmly. DOROTHY, with clenched hands, watches her. She tries to make out from her face whether NORAH knows anything.*

WYNNE: Miss Marsh, so far as you know, there's no other will?

NORAH: How d'you mean?

WYNNE: Miss Wickham didn't make a later one—without my assistance, I mean? You know of nothing in the house, for instance?

NORAH: [*Quite decidedly.*] Oh, no. Miss Wickham always said you had her will. She was extremely methodical.

WYNNE: I feel I ought to ask because she consulted me about making a fresh will a couple of years ago. She told me what she wanted to do, but gave me no actual instructions to draw it. I thought perhaps she might have done it herself.

NORAH: I heard nothing about it. I'm sure that her only will is in your hands.

WYNNE: Then I think we may take it that this . . .

[DOROTHY suddenly understands; she interrupts quickly.

DOROTHY: When was that will made?

WYNNE: Eight or nine years ago. . . . The exact date was March 4th, 1904.

[DOROTHY gives NORAH a long, searching look.

DOROTHY: When did you first come to Miss Wickham?

NORAH: At the end of nineteen hundred and three.

[There is a slight pause.

WYNNE: Shall I read it, or would you just like to know the particulars? It is very short.

DOROTHY: Let us just know roughly.

WYNNE: Well, Miss Wickham left one hundred pounds to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, and one hundred pounds to the General Hospital at Tunbridge Wells, and the entire residue of her fortune to her nephew, Mr. James Wickham.

[DOROTHY gives a sharp inspiration of triumph. She looks again at NORAH, but NORAH gives no sign of emotion.

WICKHAM: And Miss Marsh?

WYNNE: Miss Marsh is not mentioned.

NORAH: [With a faint smile.] I could hardly expect to be. At the time the will was drawn I had been Miss Wickham's companion for only a few months.

WYNNE: That is why I asked whether you knew of any later will. When I talked to Miss Wickham on the subject she said her wish was to make adequate provision for you after her death. I think she had spoken to you about it.

NORAH: Yes.

WYNNE: She mentioned three hundred a year.

NORAH: That was very kind of her. I'm glad she wished to do something for me.

WYNNE: Oddly enough she spoke about it to Dr. Evans only a few days before she died.

WICKHAM: Perhaps there *is* a later will somewhere?

WYNNE: I honestly don't think so.

NORAH: I'm sure there isn't.

WYNNE: Dr. Evans was talking to Miss Wickham about Miss Marsh. She was tired out and he wanted Miss Wickham to have a professional nurse. She told him then that I had the will and she had left Miss Marsh amply provided for.

DOROTHY: [*Quickly.*] That isn't legal, of course?

WYNNE: What isn't?

DOROTHY: I mean, no one could force us—I mean, the will stands as it is, doesn't it?

WYNNE: Certainly.

WICKHAM: I'm afraid it's a great disappointment to you, Miss Marsh.

NORAH: [*Lightly.*] I never count my chickens before they're hatched.

WYNNE: It would be very natural if Miss Marsh were disappointed under the circumstances. I think she'd been led to expect . . .

DOROTHY: [*Interrupting.*] Our aunt left a very small fortune, I understand, and I suppose she felt it wouldn't be fair to leave a large part of it away from her own family.

WICKHAM: Of course, it is family money; she inherited it from my grandfather, and . . . but I want you to know, Miss Marsh, that my wife and I thoroughly appreciate all you did for my aunt. Money couldn't repay your care and devotion. You've been perfectly wonderful.

NORAH: It's extremely good of you to say so. I was very fond of Miss Wickham. Nothing I did for her was any trouble.

WYNNE: I think everyone who saw Miss Marsh with Miss Wickham must be aware that during the ten years she was with her she never spared herself.

WICKHAM: [*Hesitatingly, with a glance at his wife.*] Of course, my aunt was a very trying woman.

DOROTHY: [*Agreeably.*] Earning one's living is always unpleasant. If it weren't there'd be no incentive to work.

[NORAH gives her a glance of quiet amusement at this surprising remark.]

WICKHAM: My wife and I would be very glad to make some kind of acknowledgment of your services.

DOROTHY: I was just going to mention it.

WYNNE: [*Brightening a little.*] I felt sure that under the circumstances . . .

DOROTHY: [*Interrupting him quickly.*] What were your wages, Miss Marsh?

NORAH: Thirty pounds a year.

DOROTHY: Really? Many ladies are glad to go as companion without any salary, just for the sake of a home and congenial society. I daresay you've been able to save a good deal in all these years.

NORAH: [*Frigidly.*] I had to dress myself decently, Mrs. Wickham.

DOROTHY: [*With all the charm she can put into her manner.*] Well, I'm sure my husband will be very glad to give you a year's salary, won't you, Jim?

NORAH: It's very kind of you, but I'm not inclined to accept anything but what's legally due to me.

DOROTHY: [*Undisturbed.*] You must remember that there'll be very heavy death duties to pay. They'll swallow up

the income from Miss Wickham's estate for at least two years, won't they, Mr. Wynne?

NORAH: I quite understand.

DOROTHY: Perhaps you'll change your mind.

NORAH: I don't think so.

[There is a slight, rather awkward pause. MR. WYNNE gets up. His manner shows that he is not impressed by MRS. WICKHAM's generosity.]

WYNNE: Well, I think I must leave you.

WICKHAM: We must go, too, Dorothy.

DOROTHY: *[Quite at ease.]* Oh, it'll only take five minutes to get down to the station in a cab.

WYNNE: Good-bye, Miss Marsh. If I can be of any help to you I hope you'll let me know.

NORAH: That's very kind of you.

WYNNE: *[To DOROTHY.]* Good-bye.

[He bows slightly to her, nods to WICKHAM and during DOROTHY's next speech goes out.]

DOROTHY: *[Very friendly and affable.]* Jim will be writing to you in a day or two. You know how grateful we both are for all you did for our poor aunt. We shall be glad to give you the very highest references.

WICKHAM: *[Relieved to be able to offer something.]* Oh, yes, we'll do everything we can.

DOROTHY: You're such a wonderful nurse, I'm sure you'll have no difficulty in getting another situation. I expect I can find you something myself. I'll ask among all my friends.

[NORAH looks at her reflectively, but does not answer. DOROTHY beams and smiles at her.]

WICKHAM: Come on, Dorothy, we really haven't got any time to lose. Good-bye, Miss Marsh.

NORAH: Good-bye.

[They bustle out and in a moment the sound is heard of wheels on the drive as the cab carries them away. NORAH is left alone. She stands staring in front of her. She does not hear MISS PRINGLE come in from the garden.]

MISS PRINGLE: I thought they were never going. Well?
[NORAH turns and looks at her without a word. MISS PRINGLE is startled.] Norah! What's the matter? Isn't it as much as you thought?

NORAH: Miss Wickham's left me nothing.

MISS PRINGLE: Oh!

NORAH: Not a penny! Oh, it's cruel. After all, there was no need for her to leave me anything. She gave me board and lodging and thirty pounds a year. If I stayed it was because I chose. She needn't have promised me anything. She needn't have prevented me from marrying.

MISS PRINGLE: My dear, you could never have married the little assistant. He wasn't a gentleman.

NORAH: Ten years! The ten best years of a woman's life, when other girls are enjoying themselves. And what did I get for it? Board and lodging and thirty pounds a year. A cook does better than that.

MISS PRINGLE: We can't expect to make so much money as a good cook. One has to pay something for living like a lady among people of one's own class.

NORAH: Oh, it's cruel.

MISS PRINGLE: *[Trying to console her.]* My dear, don't give way. I'm sure you'll have no difficulty in finding another situation. You wash lace beautifully, and no one can arrange flowers like you.

NORAH: I was dreaming of France and Italy. . . . I shall spend ten years more with an old lady, and then she'll die

and I shall look out for another situation. It won't be so easy then because I shan't be so young. And so it'll go on till I can't find a situation because I'm too old, and some charitable people will get me into a home. You like the life, don't you?

MISS PRINGLE: My dear, there are so few things a gentlewoman can do.

NORAH: When I think of these ten years! Having to put up with every unreasonableness! Never being allowed to feel ill or tired! No servant would have stood what I have. The humiliation I've endured!

MISS PRINGLE: You're tired and out of sorts. Everyone isn't so trying as Miss Wickham. I'm sure Mrs. Hubbard has been kindness itself to me.

NORAH: Considering.

MISS PRINGLE: I don't know what you mean by considering.

NORAH: Considering that she's rich and you're poor. She gives you her old clothes. She often doesn't ask you to have dinner by yourself when she's giving a party. She doesn't remind you that you're dependent unless she's very much put out. But you—you've had thirty years of it. You've eaten the bitter bread of slavery till—till it tastes like plum cake.

MISS PRINGLE: [*Rather hurt.*] I don't know why you say such things to me, Norah.

[*Before NORAH has time to answer KATE comes in.*]

KATE: Mr. Hornby would like to see you for a minute, Miss.

NORAH: [*Surprised.*] Now?

KATE: I told him I didn't think it would be convenient, Miss, but he says it's very important, and he won't detain you more than five minutes.

NORAH: What a nuisance. . . . Ask him to come in.

KATE: Very good, Miss.

[*Exit.*]

NORAH: I wonder what on earth he wants.

MISS PRINGLE: Who is he, Norah?

NORAH: Oh, he's the son of Colonel Hornby. Don't you know, he lives at the top of Molyneux Park. His mother was a great friend of Miss Wickham's. He comes down here now and then for week-ends. He's got something to do with motor-cars.

[KATE shows the visitor in.

KATE: Mr. Hornby.

[*She goes out. REGINALD HORNBY is a good-looking young man, with a neat head on a long, elegant body. His dark, sleek hair is carefully brushed, his small moustache is trim and curled. His beautiful clothes suggest the fashionable tailors of Savile Row. His tie, his handkerchief protruding from the breast pocket, his boots, are the very latest thing. He is a nut.*

HORNBY: I say, I'm awfully sorry to blow in like this. But I didn't know if you'd be staying on here, and I wanted to catch you. And I'm off in a day or two, myself.

NORAH: Won't you sit down? Mr. Hornby—Miss Pringle.

HORNBY: How d'you do? Everything go off O.K.?

NORAH: I beg your pardon?

HORNBY: Funeral, I mean. Mother went. Regular beano for her.

[*MISS PRINGLE, rather shocked, draws herself up primly, but NORAH's eyes twinkle with amusement at his airy manner.*

NORAH: Really?

HORNBY: You see, she's getting on. I'm the child of her old age—Benjamin, don't you know. [*He turns to Miss PRINGLE.*] Benjamin and Sarah, you know.

MISS PRINGLE: I understand perfectly, but it wasn't Sarah.

HORNBY: Wasn't it? When one of her old friends dies, mother goes to the funeral and says to herself: "Well, I've seen her out, anyhow." Then she comes back and

eats muffins for tea. She always eats muffins after she's been to a funeral.

NORAH: The maid said you wanted to see about something.

HORNBY: That's right, I was forgetting. [*To Miss PRINGLE.*]
If Sarah wasn't Benjamin's mother, whose mother was she?

MISS PRINGLE: If you want to know, I recommend you to read your Bible.

HORNBY: [*With much satisfaction.*] I thought it was a stumper.
[*To NORAH.*] The fact is, I'm going to Canada, and mother told me you'd got a brother or something out there.

NORAH: A brother, not a something.

HORNBY: And she said, perhaps you wouldn't mind giving me a letter to him.

NORAH: I will with pleasure. But I'm afraid he won't be much use to you. He's a farmer and he lives miles away from anywhere.

HORNBY: But I'm going in for farming.

NORAH: Are you? What on earth for?

HORNBY: I've jolly well got to do something, and I think farming's about the best thing I can do. One gets a lot of shooting and riding, you know. And then there are tennis parties and dances. And you make a pot of money, there's no doubt about that.

NORAH: I thought you were in some motor business in London.

HORNBY: Well, I was in a way. But . . . I thought you'd have heard about it. Mother's been telling everybody. Governor won't speak to me. Altogether things are rotten. I want to get out of this beastly country as quick as I can.

NORAH: Would you like me to give you the letter at once?

HORNBY: I wish you would. [NORAH sits down at an *escritoire* and begins to write a letter.] Fact is, I'm broke. I was all right as long as I stuck to bridge. I used to make money on that. Over a thousand a year.

MISS PRINGLE: [*Horrified.*] What!

HORNBY: Playing regularly, you know. If I hadn't been a fool I'd have stuck to that. But I got bitten with chemi.

NORAH: [*Turning round.*] With what?

HORNBY: *Chemin de fer*. Never heard of it? I got in the habit of going to Thornton's. I suppose you never heard of him either. He keeps a gambling hell. Gives you a slap-up supper for nothing, as much pop as you can drink, and changes your cheques like a bird. The result is I've lost every bob I had, and then Thornton sued me on a cheque I'd given him. The Governor forked out, but he says I've got to go to Canada. I'm never going to gamble again, I can tell you that.

NORAH: Oh, well, that's something.

HORNBY: You can't make money at chemi. The cagnotte's bound to clear you out in the end. When I come back I'm going to stick to bridge. There are always plenty of mugs about, and if you've got a good head for cards you can't help making an income out of it.

NORAH: Here is your letter.

HORNBY: Thanks awfully. I daresay I shan't want it, you know. I expect I shall get offered a job the moment I land, but there's no harm having it. I'll be getting along.

NORAH: Good-bye, then, and good luck.

HORNBY: Good-bye.

[*He shakes hands with NORAH and MISS PRINGLE and goes out.*]

MISS PRINGLE: Norah, why don't you go to Canada? Now

your brother has a farm of his own I should have thought . . .

NORAH: [*Interrupting.*] My brother's married. He married four years ago.

MISS PRINGLE: You never told me.

NORAH: I couldn't.

MISS PRINGLE: Why? Isn't his wife . . . isn't his wife nice?

NORAH: She was a waitress at a scrubby little hotel in Winnipeg.

MISS PRINGLE: What are you going to do, then?

NORAH: It's no good crying over spilt milk. I'll look out for another situation.

END OF THE FIRST ACT

THE SECOND ACT

SCENE: *The living-room and kitchen on EDWARD MARSH'S farm at Dyer, Manitoba. It is a room lined with brown planks, and on the walls in cheap gilt frames are coloured supplements from the Christmas numbers of illustrated papers. Over one door is the head of a moose, and over the other a large kitchen clock. The floor is covered with shiny oilcloth. In the window are geraniums growing in maple-syrup tins. On one side is a large American stove. There is a dresser of unvarnished deal on which are plates and cups and saucers. They are of the plainest earthenware, and few of them match. There are two American rockers and a number of kitchen chairs. There is a plain kitchen table. On the stove is an enormous kettle and a couple of saucepans. There is a small bookshelf on which are a few tattered novels and some old magazines. The table is set for dinner with a cheap white cloth, none too clean. ED MARSH is sitting at one end, with the remains of a joint of cold beef in front of him, and at the other end is his wife, with a teapot, milk-jug, and sugar-basin. There is a loaf of bread on the table, a large tin containing maple-syrup, and the remains of a milk pudding. NORAH is sitting next to her sister-in-law and beside her is REGINALD HORNBY. Opposite are FRANK TAYLOR and BENJAMIN TROTTER. Dinner is just finished. GERTIE MARSH is a dark little person, with a hard look and a dried-up skin. She is thin and nervous, an active hard-working woman with a sharp tongue and, outwardly at least, little tenderness. She is dressed in a shirt-waist, a serge skirt, and brown, rather smart high-heeled shoes. She wears a small apron. NORAH wears a white blouse and a green skirt. ED MARSH is a good-natured, easy-going man, with a small moustache and untidy hair. He wears a black flannel shirt, with white lines on it, a black waistcoat, and dark grubby trousers. The others are hired men. FRANK TAYLOR is a tall fellow, strong, with clean-cut features and frank,*

humorous eyes. He is clean shaven. His movements are slow and he speaks with a marked accent. He is very sure of himself. He wears a dark flannel shirt and a pair of overalls, which have been blue, but are now black and grimy with age. The braces which hold them up announce that they come from Eaton's, Winnipeg. BEN TROTTER is an English labourer, with broken, discoloured teeth, and hair cut very short, with something like a love-lock plastered on his forehead. He is dressed in the same way as FRANK TAYLOR. REGGIE HORNBY's head is still neat and trim, his hair is carefully brushed. His overalls are much newer than the others'. He wears a flannel shirt which was obviously made in Piccadilly.

MARSH: Have some more syrup, Reg?

HORNBY: No, thank you.

MARSH: Has everyone finished?

GERTIE: It looks like it. [MARSH pushes back his chair, takes a pouch and pipe from his pocket and lights up. TAYLOR does the same.] We'll be able to start on the ironing this afternoon.

NORAH: Very well.

TROTTER: It was a rare big wash you done this morning by the look of it on the line.

NORAH: My arms are just aching.

GERTIE: When you've been out in this country a bit longer you'll learn not to wear more things than you can help.

NORAH: Was there more than my fair share?

GERTIE: You use double the number of stockings than what I do. And everything else is the same.

NORAH: [With a smile.] Clean but incompetent.

GERTIE: There's many a true word spoken in jest.

TAYLOR: Say, Reg, is it true that when you first come out you asked Ed where the bath-room was?

TROTTER: [*With a chuckle.*] That's right. Ed told 'im there was a river a mile and a 'alf from 'ere, an' that was the only bath-room 'e knew.

MARSH: One soon gets used to that sort of thing, eh, Reg?

HORNBY: Rather. If I saw a bath-room now it would only make me nervous.

TAYLOR: Out in B.C. I knew a couple of Englishmen who were baching and the only other people around were Indians. The first two years they was there they wouldn't have anything to do with the Indians because they was so dirty, and after that the Indians wouldn't have anything to do with them. [*He puts his fingers to his nose to indicate a nasty smell.*]

NORAH: What a disgusting story!

TAYLOR: D'you think so? I rather like it.

NORAH: You would.

[*He looks at her with a little smile, but does not answer.*]

GERTIE: [*Getting up.*] Are you going to sit there all day, Norah?

MARSH: Why don't you keep quiet for five minutes? I guess Norah's not sorry to have a rest after that wash.

GERTIE: The amount of work Norah did isn't going to tire her much, I reckon.

NORAH: I'm not used to that sort of work yet. It takes it out of me a bit.

GERTIE: I've not found out what sort of work you are used to.

[*NORAH gets up and the women start clearing away the table. MARSH moves into one of the rocking-chairs and smokes.*]

MARSH: Give her time to get used to the life, Gertie. You can't expect everything all at once.

GERTIE: It's always the same with English people. You have to teach them everything.

MARSH: Well, you didn't have to teach me to propose, Gertie.

[NORAH takes away things from before TAYLOR and *Le gets up.*

TAYLOR: I guess I'm in your way.

NORAH: Not more than usual, thank you.

TAYLOR: [*Smiling.*] I guess you'll not be sorry to see the last of me.

NORAH: I can't honestly say that it makes the least difference to me whether you go or stay.

MARSH: Now don't start quarrelling, you two.

HORNBY: When does your train go, Frank?

TAYLOR: Half-past three. I'll be starting from here in about an hour.

MARSH: Reg can go over with you and he'll drive the rig back again.

TAYLOR: All right. I'll go and dress myself in a bit.

GERTIE: I guess you'll be glad to get back to your own place.

TAYLOR: I guess I shan't be sorry.

[*The clearing away is finished. GERTIE gets a large metal basin and puts it on the table. NORAH fetches the kettle and pours hot water into the basin. They begin washing up.*

GERTIE: I'll do the washing, Norah, and you can dry.

NORAH: All right.

GERTIE: I've noticed the things aren't half clean when I leave them to you to do.

NORAH: I'm sorry. Why didn't you tell me?

GERTIE: I suppose *you* never did the washing up in England. Too grand?

NORAH: I don't suppose anyone would wash up if they could help it. It's not very amusing.

GERTIE: You always want to be amused.

NORAH: No. But I want to be happy.

GERTIE: Well, you've got a room over your head and a comfortable bed to sleep in, three good meals a day, and plenty to do; that's all anybody wants to make them happy, I guess.

HORNBY: Oh, lord!

GERTIE: [*Turning sharply on him.*] Well, if you don't like Canada, why did you come out?

HORNBY: [*Rising slowly to his feet.*] You don't suppose I'd have let them send me if I'd known what I was in for? Not much. Up at five in the morning and working in the fields like a navvy till your back feels as if it 'ud break, and then back again in the afternoon. And the same thing day after day. What was the good of sending me to Harrow and Oxford if that's what I've got to do all my life?

MARSH: You'll get used to it soon enough, Reg. It's a bit hard at first, but when you get your foot in you wouldn't change it for any other life.

GERTIE: This isn't a country for a man to go to sleep with and wait for something to turn up.

TROTTER: I wouldn't go back to England now, not for nothing. England! Eighteen bob a week, that's what I earned and no prospects. Out of work five months in the year.

NORAH: What did you do in England?

TROTTER: Bricklayer, Miss.

GERTIE: You needn't call her miss. Norah's her name. You call me Gertie, don't you?

TROTTER: What with strikes an' bad times you never knew where you was. And the foreman bullying you. I don't

know what all. I 'ad about enough of it, I can tell you. I've never been out of work since the day I landed. I've had as much to eat as I wanted, and I'm saving money. In this country everybody's as good as everybody else.

NORAH: If not better.

TROTTER: In two years I shall be able to set up for myself. Why, there's old man Thompson, up at Pratt, he started as a bricklayer, come from Yorkshire, he did. He's got seven thousand dollars in the bank now.

MARSH: You fellows who come out now have a much softer thing on than I did when I first came. In those days they wouldn't have an Englishman, they'd have a Galician rather. In Winnipeg, when they advertised in the paper for labour, you'd see often as not, no English need apply.

GERTIE: Well, it was their own fault. They wouldn't work or anything. They just soaked.

MARSH: It was their own fault right enough. This was the dumping ground for all the idlers, drunkards and scallywags in England. They had the delusion over there that if a man was too big a rotter to do anything at all in England he'd only got to be sent out here and he'd make a fortune.

TAYLOR: I guess things ain't as bad as that now. They send us a different class. It takes an Englishman two years longer than anybody else to get the hang of things, but when once he tumbles to it he's better than any of them.

MARSH: I guess nowadays everyone's glad to see the Englishman make good. When I nearly smashed up three years ago, I had no end of offers to help.

HORNBY: How did you smash up?

MARSH: Oh, I had a run of bad luck. One year my crop was frosted and then next year I was hailed out. It wants a good deal of capital to stand up against that.

TAYLOR: That's what happened to me. I was hailed out, and I hadn't got capital, so I just had to hire out. [To NORAH.]

If it hadn't been for that hailstorm you wouldn't have had the pleasure of making my acquaintance.

NORAH: [*Ironically.*] How hollow and empty life would have been without that.

GERTIE: I wonder you didn't just quit and start out Calgary way.

TAYLOR: Well, I'd put in two years on my homestead and done a lot of clearing. It seemed kind of silly to lose my rights now. And when you've been hailed out once the chances are it won't happen again, for some years that is, and by that time I ought to have put a bit by.

NORAH: What sort of a house have you got?

TAYLOR: Well, it ain't what you might call a palace, but it's large enough for two.

MARSH: Thinking of marrying?

TAYLOR: Well, I guess it's kind of lonesome on a farm without a woman. But it's not so easy to find a wife when you're just starting on your own. Canadian girls think twice before taking a farmer.

GERTIE: They know something, I guess.

MARSH: Well, you took one, Gertie.

GERTIE: Not because I wanted to, you can be sure of that. I don't know how you got round me.

MARSH: I wonder.

GERTIE: I guess it was because you was kind of helpless, and I didn't know what you'd do without me.

MARSH: I guess it was love and you couldn't help yourself.

TAYLOR: I'm thinking of going to one of them employment agencies when I get to Winnipeg and looking the girls over.

NORAH: Like sheep.

TAYLOR: I don't know anythin' about sheep. I've never had to do with sheep.

NORAH: And d'you think you know anything about women?

TAYLOR: I guess I can tell if they're strong and willing. And so long as they ain't cock-eyed I don't mind taking the rest on trust.

NORAH: And what inducement is there for a girl to have you?

TROTTER: That's why he wants to catch 'em young, when they've just landed and don't know much.

TAYLOR: I've got my quarter section—a hundred and sixty acres, with seventy of it cleared—and I've got a shack that I built myself. That's something, ain't it?

NORAH: You've got a home to offer and enough to eat and drink. A girl can get that anywhere. Why, they're simply begging for service.

TAYLOR: Some girls like getting married. There's something in the word that appeals to them.

NORAH: You seem to think a girl would jump at the chance of marrying you.

TAYLOR: She might do worse.

NORAH: I think you flatter yourself.

TAYLOR: I know my job and there ain't too many as can say that. I've got brains.

NORAH: What makes you think so?

TAYLOR: Well, I can see you're no fool.

GERTIE: [*With a chuckle.*] He put one over on you then, Norah.

TAYLOR: [*Good-humouredly.*] Because you've got no use for me, there's no saying but what others may have.

[*GERTIE takes the basin out in order to pour away the water. NORAH goes on drying the crockery.*]

NORAH: Of course, there's no accounting for tastes.

TAYLOR: I can try, can't I?

NORAH: It's very wise of you to go to an agency. A girl's more likely to marry you when she's only seen you once than when she's seen you often.

TAYLOR: [*With a wink at the others.*] It seems to make you quite mad, the thought of me marrying.

NORAH: You wouldn't talk about it like that unless you looked down upon women. Oh, I pity the poor wretched creature who becomes your wife.

TAYLOR: I guess she won't have a bad time when I've broken her in to my ways.

NORAH: Are you under the impression you can do that?

TAYLOR: Yep.

NORAH: You're not expecting that there'll be much love lost between you and the girl you—honour with your choice?

TAYLOR: What's love got to do with it? It's a business proposition.

NORAH: What!

TAYLOR: I give her board and lodging and the charm of my society. And in return she's got to cook and bake and wash and keep the shack clean and tidy. And if she can do that I'll not be particular what she looks like.

MARSH: So long as she's not cock-eyed.

TAYLOR: No, I draw the line at that.

NORAH: [*Ironically.*] I beg your pardon. I didn't know it was a general servant you wanted. You spend a dollar and a half on a marriage licence, and then you don't have to pay any wages. It's a good investment.

TAYLOR: You've got a sharp tongue in your head for a girl, Norah.

NORAH: Please don't call me Norah.

MARSH: Don't be so silly. It's the custom of the country. Why, they all call me Ed.

NORAH: I don't care what the custom of the country is. I'm not going to be called Norah by the hired man.

TAYLOR: Don't you bother, Ed. I'll call her Miss Marsh if she likes it better.

NORAH: I should like to see you married to someone who'd give you what you deserved. I'd like to see your pride humbled. You think yourself very high and mighty, don't you? I'd like to see a woman take you by the heart-strings and wring them till you screamed with pain.

MARSH: [*With a laugh.*] Norah, how violent you are.

NORAH: You're overbearing, supercilious, egotistic.

TAYLOR: I'm not sure as I know what them long words means, but I guess they ain't exactly complimentary.

NORAH: [*Furiously.*] I guess they ain't.

TAYLOR: I'm sorry for that. I was thinking of offering you the position before I went to the employment agency.

NORAH: How dare you speak to me like that!

MARSH: Don't fly into a temper, Norah.

NORAH: He's got no right to say impudent things to me.

MARSH: Don't you see he's only having a joke with you?

NORAH: He shouldn't joke. He's got no sense of humour.

[*NORAH drops a cup and breaks it, and as this happens GERTIE comes in.*]

GERTIE: Butter fingers.

NORAH: I'm so sorry.

GERTIE: You clumsy thing. You're always doing something wrong.

NORAH: You needn't worry, I'll pay for it.

GERTIE: Who wants you to pay for it? D'you think I can't afford to pay for a cup? You might say you're sorry—that's all I want you to do.

NORAH: I said I was sorry.

GERTIE: No, you didn't.

MARSH: I heard her, Gertie.

GERTIE: She said she was sorry as if she was doing me a favour.

NORAH: You don't expect me to go down on my knees to you? The cup's worth twopence.

GERTIE: It isn't the value I'm thinking about, it's the carelessness.

NORAH: It's only the third thing I've broken since I've been here.

GERTIE: You can't do anything; you're more helpless than a child of six. You're all the same, all of you.

NORAH: You're not going to abuse the whole British nation because I've broken a cup worth twopence, are you?

GERTIE: And the airs you put on. Condescending isn't the word. It's enough to try the patience of a saint.

MARSH: Oh, shut up.

GERTIE: You've never done a stroke of work in your life, and you come here and think you can teach me everything.

NORAH: I don't know about that, but I think I can teach you manners.

GERTIE: How dare you say that! How dare you! You come here and I give you a home, you sleep in my blankets and eat my food, and then you insult me.

[She bursts into tears.]

MARSH: Now then, Gertie, don't cry. Don't be so silly.

GERTIE: Oh, leave me alone. Of course you take her part. You would. It's nothing to you that I've slaved for you for three years. As soon as she comes along and plays the lady . . .

[She hurries out of the room. MARSH hesitates for a moment and then follows his wife. There is a momentary pause.]

TAYLOR: I reckon I might be cleaning myself. Time's getting on. You coming, Ben?

TROTTER: Ycs, I'm coming. I suppose you'll take the mare?

TAYLOR: Yep. That's what Ed said this morning.

[*They go out. NORAH is left alone with REGGIE HORNBY.*]

HORNBY: [*With a little smile.*] Well, are you enjoying the land of promise as much as you said I should?

NORAH: We've both made our bed and we must lie in it.

HORNBY: D'you remember that afternoon at Miss Wickham's when I came for a letter to your brother?

NORAH: I hadn't much intention of coming to Canada then.

HORNBY: I don't mind telling you that I mean to get back to England the very first opportunity I get. I'm willing to give away my share of the White Man's Burden with a packet of chewing gum.

NORAH: [*Smiling.*] You prefer the Effete East?

HORNBY: Rather. Give me the degrading influence of a decadent civilisation every time.

NORAH: Your father will be pleased to see you, won't he?

HORNBY: I don't think. Of course, I was a damned fool ever to leave Winnipeg.

NORAH: I understand you didn't till you were forced to.

HORNBY: Your brother behaved like a perfect brick. I sent him on your letter and told him I was up against it—d'you know I hadn't got a bob? I was jolly glad to earn half a dollar by digging a pit in a man's garden. Bit thick, you know.

NORAH: [*Laughing.*] I can see you.

HORNBY: Your brother sent me my fare to come here and told me I could do the chores. I didn't know what they were. I found out it was doing all the jobs that it wasn't anybody's else's job to do. And they call it God's own country.

[Meanwhile NORAH has put a couple of irons on the stove and now she gets the ironing board. It is rather heavy for her.]

NORAH: I think you're falling into the ways very well.

HORNBY: What makes you think that?

NORAH: [With a smile.] You can sit by and smoke your pipe, and watch me carry the ironing board about.

HORNBY: [Without moving.] D'you want me to help you?

NORAH: No. . . . It would remind me of home.

HORNBY: I suppose I shall have to stick it out at least a year, unless I can humbug the mater into sending me enough money to get home with.

NORAH: She won't send you a penny if she's wise.

HORNBY: Wouldn't you chuck it if you could?

NORAH: [With a flash of spirit.] And acknowledge myself beaten? [There is a short pause.] You don't know what I went through before I came here. I tried to get another position as lady's companion. I answered advertisements. I hung about the agent's offices. . . . Two people offered to take me without a salary. One woman suggested ten shillings a week and my lunch. She expected me to find myself a room, clothes, breakfast and supper on ten shillings a week. That settled me. I wrote to Eddie and said I was coming. When I'd paid my fare I had eight pounds in the world. That's the result of ten year's work as lady's companion. When he came to meet me at the station at Dyer . . .

HORNBY: Don't call it a station, call it a dépôt.

NORAH: My whole fortune consisted of seven dollars and thirty-five cents.

[MARSH comes in and gives HORNBY a glance.]

MARSH: What about that wood you were splitting, Reg? You'd better be getting on with it.

HORNEY: Oh, lord, is there no rest for the wicked?

[He gets up slowly and saunters lazily to the door.]

MARSH: Don't hurry yourself, will you?

HORNEY: Brilliant sarcasm is just flying about the house to-day.

[He goes out.]

MARSH: That's about the toughest nut I've ever been set to crack. Why on earth did you give him a letter to me?

NORAH: He asked me. I couldn't very well say no.

[Throughout the scene NORAH goes on ironing things which she takes from a pile of washing in the basket.]

MARSH: I can't make out what people are up to in the Old Country. They think that if a man is too big a rotter to do anything at all in England they've only got to send him out here and he'll make a fortune.

NORAH: He may improve.

MARSH: *[With a look at NORAH.]* You've thoroughly upset Gertie.

NORAH: She's very easily upset, isn't she?

MARSH: It's only since you came that things haven't gone right. We never used to have scenes.

NORAH: Do you blame me? I came prepared to like her and help her. She met all my advances with suspicion.

MARSH: She thinks you look down upon her. You ought to remember that she never had your opportunities. She's earned her own living from the time she was thirteen. You can't expect in her the refinements of a woman who's led the protected life that you have.

NORAH: I haven't said a word that could be turned into the least suggestion of disapproval of anything she did.

MARSH: My dear, your whole manner has expressed disapproval. You won't do things in the way we do them. After all, the way you lived in Tunbridge Wells isn't the

only way people can live. Our ways suit us, and when you live amongst us you must adopt them.

NORAH: She never gave me a chance to learn them. She treated me with suspicion and enmity from the very first day I came here. When she sneered at me because I talked of a station instead of a dépôt, of course I went on talking of a station. Because I prefer to drink water with my meals instead of strong tea she said I was putting on side.

MARSH: Why can't you humour her? You see, you've got to take the blame for all the English people who came here in the past and were lazy, worthless and supercilious. They called us Colonials and turned up their noses at us. What d'you expect us to do? Say, Thank you very much, sir; we know we're not worthy to black your boots; and don't bother to work—it'll be a pleasure for us to give you money? It's no good blinking the fact, there was a great prejudice against the English, but it's giving way now, and every sensible man and woman who comes out can do something to destroy it.

NORAH: [*With a shrug of the shoulders.*] If you're tired of having me here I can go back to Winnipeg. I shan't have any difficulty in finding something to do.

MARSH: Good lord, I don't want you to go. I like having you here, and it's company for Gertie. And you know, jobs aren't so easy to find as you think, especially now the winter's coming on. Everyone wants a job in the city.

NORAH: What d'you want me to do?

MARSH: Well, you've got to live with Gertie. Why can't you make the best of things and meet her half way? You might make allowances for her even if you think her unreasonable.

NORAH: I'll have a try.

MARSH: I think you ought to apologise for what you said to her just now.

NORAH: I? I've got nothing to apologise for. She drove me to distraction.

[There is a moment's pause. MARSH, now that he has come to the object of all he has been saying, is a little embarrassed.]

MARSH: She says she won't speak to you again until you beg her pardon.

NORAH: Does she look upon that as a great hardship?

MARSH: My dear, we're twelve miles from the nearest store. We're thrown upon one another through the whole of the winter. Last year there was a bad blizzard, and for six weeks we didn't see a soul outside the farm. Unless we learn to put up with one another's whims life becomes a perfect hell.

NORAH: You can go on talking all night, Eddie—I'll never apologise. Time after time when she sneered at me till my blood boiled, I've kept my temper. She deserved ten times more than I said. D'you think I'm going to knuckle under to a woman like that?

MARSH: Remember she's my wife, Norah.

NORAH: Why didn't you marry a lady?

MARSH: What the dickens d'you think is the use of being a lady out here?

NORAH: You've degenerated since you left England.

MARSH: Now, look here, my dear, I'll just tell you what Gertie did for me. She was a waitress in Winnipeg at the Minnedosa Hotel, and she was making money. She knew what the life was on a farm, much harder than anything she'd been used to in the city, but she accepted all the hardship of it, and the monotony—because she loved me.

NORAH: She thought it a good match. You were a gentleman.

MARSH: Fiddledidee. She had the chance of much better men than me. . . . And when I lost my harvest two years running, d'you know what she did? She went back to the hotel in Winnipeg for the winter so as to carry things on till the next harvest. And at the end of the winter she gave me every cent she'd earned to pay the interest of my mortgage and the instalments on the machinery.

[There is a pause.]

NORAH: Very well, I'll apologise. But leave me alone with her. I—I don't think I could do it before anyone else.

MARSH: All right. I'll go and tell her.

[He goes out. NORAH is left alone with her thoughts. In a moment GERTIE comes back, followed by MARSH.]

NORAH: *[Trying to take things lightly.]* I've been getting on with the ironing.

GERTIE: Have you?

NORAH: *[With a smile.]* That is one of the few things I can do all right.

GERTIE: Any child can iron.

MARSH: Well, I'll be going down to the shed.

GERTIE: *[Turning to him quickly.]* What for?

MARSH: I want to see about mending that door. It hasn't been closing properly.

GERTIE: I thought Norah had something to say to me.

MARSH: That's what I'm going to leave you alone for.

GERTIE: I like that. She insults me before everybody and then when she's going to apologise it's got to be private. No, thank you.

NORAH: What d'you mean, Gertie?

GERTIE: You sent Ed in to tell me you was going to apologise for what you'd said, didn't you?

NORAH: For peace and quietness.

GERTIE: Well, what you said was before the men, and it's before the men you must say you're sorry.

NORAH: How can you ask me to do such a thing!

MARSH: Don't be rough on her, Gertie. No one likes apologising.

GERTIE: People who don't like apologising should keep a better lookout on their tongue.

MARSH: It can't do you any good to have her eat humble pie before the men.

GERTIE: Perhaps not, but it'll do her good.

NORAH: Gertie, don't be cruel. I'm sorry if I lost my temper just now and said anything that hurt you. Please don't make me humiliate myself before the others.

GERTIE: I've made up my mind, so it's no good talking.

NORAH: Don't you see it's bad enough to beg your pardon before Eddie?

GERTIE: [*Irritably.*] Why don't you call him Ed like the rest of us? Eddie sounds so soppy.

NORAH: I've called him Eddie all my life. . . . It's what his mother called him.

GERTIE: You do everything you can to make yourself different from all of us.

NORAH: No, I don't, I promise you I don't. Why won't you give me any credit for trying to do my best to please you?

GERTIE: That's neither here nor there. Go and fetch the men, Ed, and then I'll hear what she's got to say.

NORAH: No, I won't, I won't, I won't. You drive me too far.

GERTIE: You won't beg my pardon?

NORAH: [*Beside herself.*] I said I could teach you manners. I made a mistake, I couldn't teach you manners. One can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

MARSH: [*Sharply.*] Shut up, Norah.

GERTIE: Now you must make her, Ed.

MARSH: I'm sick to death of the pair of you.

GERTIE: I'm your wife, and I'm going to be mistress of this house.

MARSH: It's horrible to make her eat humble pie before three strange men. You've got no right to ask her to do a thing like that.

GERTIE: [*Furiously.*] Are you taking her part? What's come over you since she come here? You're not the same to me as you used to be. Why did she come here and get between us?

MARSH: I haven't done anything.

GERTIE: Haven't I been a good wife to you? Have you ever had any complaint to make about me?

MARSH: You know I haven't.

GERTIE: As soon as your sister comes along you let me be insulted. You don't say a word to defend me.

MARSH: [*With a grim smile.*] Darling, you've said a good many to defend yourself.

GERTIE: I'm sick and tired of being put upon. You must choose between us.

MARSH: What on earth d'you mean?

GERTIE: If you don't make her apologise right now before the hired men I'm quit of you.

MARSH: I can't make her apologise if she won't.

GERTIE: Then let her quit.

NORAH: Oh, I wish I could. I wish to God I could.

MARSH: You know she can't do that. There's nowhere she can go. I've offered her a home. You were quite willing when I suggested having her here.

GERTIE: I was willing because I thought she'd make herself useful. We can't afford to feed folks as don't earn their keep. We have to work for our money, we do.

NORAH: I didn't know you grudged me the little I eat. I wonder if I should if I were in your place.

MARSH: Look here, it's no good talking. I'm not going to turn her out. As long as she wants a home the farm's open to her. And she's welcome to everything I've got.

GERTIE: Then you choose her?

MARSH: [*Irritably.*] I don't know what you're talking about.

GERTIE: I said you'd got to choose between us. Very well. Let her stay. I earned my living before, and I can earn it again. I'm going.

MARSH: Don't talk such nonsense.

GERTIE: You think I don't mean it? D'you think I'm going to stay here and be put upon? Why should I?

MARSH: Don't you—love me any more?

GERTIE: Haven't I shown that I love you? Have you forgotten, Ed?

MARSH: We've gone through so much together, darling.

GERTIE: [*Hesitatingly.*] Yes, we have that.

MARSH: Won't you forgive her?

GERTIE: No, I can't. You're a man, you don't understand. If she won't apologise, either she must go or I shall.

MARSH: I can't lose you, Gertie. What should I do without you?

GERTIE: I guess you know me well enough by now. When I say a thing I do it.

NORAH: Eddie.

MARSH: [*Ill at ease.*] After all, she's my wife. If it weren't for her I should be hiring out now at forty dollars a month.

[*NORAH hesitates for a moment, then she makes up her mind.*]

NORAH: [*Hoarsely.*] Very well, I'll do what you want.

MARSH: You do insist on it, Gertie?

GERTIE: Of course I do.

MARSH: I'll go and call the men.

NORAH: Frank Taylor needn't come, need he?

GERTIE: Why not?

NORAH: He's going away to-day. It can't much matter about him, surely.

GERTIE: Why are you so particular about it, then?

NORAH: The others are English. He'll like to see me humiliated. He looks upon women as dirt. He's . . . Oh, I don't know, but not before him.

GERTIE: It'll do you a world of good to be taken down a peg or two, my lady.

NORAH: Oh, how heartless—how cruel.

GERTIE: Go on, Ed—I want to get on with my work.

[MARSH *hesitates a moment, then shrugs his shoulders and goes out.*

NORAH: [*Passionately.*] Why do you humiliate me like this?

GERTIE: You came here and thought you knew everything, I guess. You didn't know who you'd got to deal with.

NORAH: I was a stranger and homeless. If you'd had any kindness you wouldn't have treated me so. I wanted to be fond of you.

GERTIE: You despised me before you ever saw me.

[NORAH *covers her eyes for a moment with both hands, and then forces herself to make another appeal.*

NORAH: Oh, Gertie, can't we be friends? Can't we let bygones be bygones and start afresh? We're both fond of Eddie. He's your husband and you love him, and he's the only relation I have in the world. Won't you let me be a real sister to you?

GERTIE: It's rather late to say all that now.

NORAH: But it's not too late, is it? I don't know what I do that irritates you. I can see how competent you are, and I admire you so much. I know how splendid you've

been with Eddie, and how you've stuck to him through thick and thin. You've done everything for him.

GERTIE: [*Breaking in violently.*] Oh, don't go on patronising me. I shall go crazy.

NORAH: [*Astounded.*] Patronising you?

GERTIE: You talk to me as if I was a naughty child. You might be a school teacher.

NORAH: It seems perfectly hopeless.

GERTIE: Even when you're begging my pardon you put on airs. You ask me to forgive you as if you was doing me a favour.

NORAH: [*With a chuckle.*] I must have a very unfortunate manner.

GERTIE: [*Furiously.*] Don't laugh at me.

NORAH: Don't make yourself ridiculous, then.

GERTIE: D'you think I shall ever forget what you wrote to Ed before I married him?

NORAH: [*Looking at her quickly.*] I don't know what you mean.

GERTIE: Don't you? You told him it would be a disgrace if he married me. He was a gentleman and I. . . . Oh, you spread yourself out.

NORAH: He oughtn't to have shown you the letter.

GERTIE: He was dotty about me.

NORAH: I had a perfect right to try and prevent the marriage before it took place. But after it happened I only wanted to make the best of it. If you had a grudge against me why did you let me come here?

GERTIE: Ed wanted it, and it was lonely enough sometimes with the men away all day and no one to talk to. I thought you'd be company for me. . . . I can't bear it when Ed talks to you about the Old Country and people I don't know nothing about.

NORAH: [*Surprised.*] Are you jealous?

GERTIE: It's my house and I'm mistress here. I won't be put upon. What did you want to come here for, upsetting everybody? Till you come I never had a word with Ed. Oh, I hate you, I hate you.

NORAH: Gertie.

GERTIE: You've given me a chance and I'm going to take it. I'm going to take you down a peg or two.

NORAH: You're doing all you can to drive me away from here.

GERTIE: You don't think it's much catch to have you. You talk of getting a job—you couldn't get one. I know something about that, my girl. You! You can do nothing. . . . Here they are. Now take your medicine. [ED MARSH comes in, followed by TROTTER and FRANK TAYLOR. FRANK has taken off his overalls.] Where's Reg?

MARSH: He's just coming.

GERTIE: Do they know what they're here for?

MARSH: No, I didn't tell them.

[HORNBY comes in.

GERTIE: Norah insulted me a while ago before all of you, and I guess she wants to apologise.

TAYLOR: If you told me it was that, Ed, you wanted me to come here for, I reckon I'd have told you to go to hell.

NORAH: Why?

TAYLOR: I've got other things to do beside bothering my head about women's quarrels.

NORAH: Oh, I beg your pardon, I thought it was some kindly feeling in you.

GERTIE: Go on, Norah, we're waiting.

[NORAH hesitates a moment and then takes her courage in both hands.

NORAH: I'm sorry I was rude to you, Gertie. I apologise for what I said.

TAYLOR: [*With a quiet smile.*] You didn't find that very easy to say, I reckon.

MARSH: There's nothing more to be said, is there?

GERTIE: I'm quite satisfied.

MARSH: We'd better get back to work, then.

[*The men turn to go*

GERTIE: Let this be a lesson to you, my girl.

[*NORAH starts at the words. It is the last straw.*

NORAH: Frank, will you wait a minute?

TAYLOR: [*A little surprised.*] Sure. What can I do for you?

NORAH: I've understood that I'm not wanted here. I'm in the way. You said just now you wanted a woman to cook and bake for you, wash and mend your clothes, and keep your shack clean and tidy. Will I do?

TAYLOR: [*Rather amused.*] Sure.

MARSH: [*Horried.*] Norah.

NORAH: [*With a twinkle in her eye.*] I'm afraid you'll have to marry me.

TAYLOR: I guess it would be more respectable.

MARSH: Norah, you can't mean it. You're in a temper. See here, Frank, you mustn't pay any attention to her.

GERTIE: Shameless, that's what I call it.

NORAH: Why? He wants a woman to look after him. He practically proposed to me half an hour ago. Didn't you?

TAYLOR: Practically.

HORNBY: I'm bound to say I've never heard a proposal refused so emphatically.

MARSH: You've been like cat and dog with Frank ever since you came. My dear, you don't know what you're in for.

NORAH: If he's willing to risk it, I am.

TAYLOR: [*Looking at her gravely.*] It ain't an easy life you're coming to. This farm's a palace compared with my shack.

NORAH: I'm not wanted here, and you say you want me. If you'll take me, I'll come.

TAYLOR: I'll take you all right. When will you be ready? Will an hour do for you?

NORAH: [*Suddenly panic-stricken.*] An hour?

TAYLOR: Why, yes, then we can catch the three-thirty into Winnipeg. You can go to the Y.W.C.A. for the night and we'll be buckled up in the morning.

NORAH: You're in a great hurry.

TAYLOR: I suppose you meant it? You weren't just pulling a bluff?

[*NORAH hesitates for a moment and they look at one another.*]

NORAH: I shall be ready in an hour.

END OF THE SECOND ACT

THE THIRD ACT

SCENE: FRANK TAYLOR's shack at Prentice, Manitoba. It is a low log cabin, consisting of two rooms. The scene is the living-room. There is a door at the back towards the left-hand side, and on the right is another door that leads into the bedroom. A very small low window at the back. There is a stove on the left, with a long chimney. On the walls, untidily tacked up, are pictures cut out of the illustrated papers. Hanging on a nail is a Cariboo coat. On a shelf beside the stove are the few pots and pans that FRANK TAYLOR possesses. They are battered and much used. There is a broom in the corner. The furniture consists of a rocking-chair, worn with use and shabby, a table roughly made by TAYLOR himself from packing-cases, one kitchen chair and two or three packing-cases used as stools. On another shelf are maple-syrup tins, in which groceries are kept. In one corner there is an old suit-case, locally known as a grip, and a heap of old clothes; in another corner is a pile of tattered magazines and numbers of the Winnipeg Free Press. The shack has an untidy, comfortless, bedraggled air.

When the curtain rises the scene is dark and empty. There is a faint glimmer of light through the window. The night is bright and starry. There is a slight noise of a rig being driven up outside, and then voices are heard.

SHARP: Woa there! Woa!

TAYLOR: A tidy pull, that last bit. Trail's very bad.

SHARP: Stop still, you brute.

TAYLOR: I guess she wants to get home.

[Now comes the sound of a key being put into the lock. It is turned noisily and the door is opened wide. A rig stands outside and SHARP is seen still seated holding the reins.

NORAH *has just got down. Tied on the back of the rig are NORAH's trunk and TAYLOR's grip. There is a glimpse of the prairie and the bright Canadian night. TAYLOR comes in. He is wearing a waterproof coat lined with sheepskin, a dark, roughly cut suit of some coarse blue material, and a broad-brimmed flat-crowned hat.*

TAYLOR: Wait a minute, and I'll light the lamp. [*He strikes a match and looks round.*] Where in hell has it got to? The shack's about two foot by three, and I'm blamed if I can ever find a darned thing.

SHARP: I'll give you a hand with that trunk.

[*As he speaks he begins to get down. TAYLOR finds the lamp and lights it.*

TAYLOR: I'll come and help you if you'll wait a bit. Come in, Norah.

SHARP: Woa there!

[*NORAH comes in. She has on a hat and coat. She carries a string bag in which there is a number of parcels.*

NORAH: I'm quite stiff after that long drive.

TAYLOR: Are you cold?

NORAH: No, not a bit. I was well wrapped up.

TAYLOR: I guess it's freezing. But it's your first winter and you won't feel the cold like we do.

NORAH: [*Putting down her bag.*] I'll bring some of the things in.

TAYLOR: Don't touch the trunk, it's too heavy for you.

NORAH: I'm as strong as a horse.

TAYLOR: Don't touch it.

NORAH: [*With a smile.*] I won't.

[*He goes out and takes more parcels out of the rig and comes in with them.*

TAYLOR: We can all do with a cup of tea. Just have a look at the stove. It won't take two shakes to light a fire.

NORAH: It seems hardly worth while. It's so late.

TAYLOR: [*Cheerily.*] Light the fire, my girl, and don't talk about it.

[He goes out and is seen helping SHARP to unfasten the trunk. NORAH, getting down on her knees, rakes out the ashes from the stove. TAYLOR and SHARP bring the box in between them. SHARP is a rough-looking man of forty. He has been a non-commissioned officer in an English regiment, and has still something of a soldier's look.]

SHARP: This trunk of yours isn't what you might call light, Mrs. Taylor.

NORAH: It contains all I own in the world.

TAYLOR: I guess it don't do that. Since this morning you own a half share in a hundred and sixty acres of as good land as there is in Manitoba and a mighty fine shack.

NORAH: To say nothing of a husband.

SHARP: Where d'you want this put?

TAYLOR: It 'ud better go in the next room right away, or we shall be falling over it.

[They carry the trunk into the bedroom. NORAH gets up from her knees, goes over to a pile of logs by the stove, and takes two or three and some of the newspapers. The men come in again.]

TAYLOR: Here, you won't be able to light a fire with logs like that. Where's that darned axe? [*He glances round and sees it by the logs. He takes a couple and splits them.*] I guess you'll have plenty to do getting the shack tidy. [*SHARP brings in TAYLOR's grip and his gun.*] Now, that's real good of you, Sid.

SHARP: Get any shooting down at Dyer, Frank?

TAYLOR: There was a rare lot of prairie chickens around, but I didn't get out more than a couple of days.

SHARP: Well, I'll be getting back home now.

TAYLOR: Oh, stay and have a cup of tea, won't you?

SHARP: I don't think I will. It's getting late and the mare'll get cold.

TAYLOR: Put her in the shed.

SHARP: No, I think I'll be toddling. My missus says I was to give you her compliments, Mrs. Taylor, and she'll be round to-morrow to see if there's anything you want.

NORAH: That's very kind of her. Thank you very much.

TAYLOR: Sid lives where you saw that light just about a mile from here, Norah. Mrs. Sharp'll be able to help you a lot at first.

SHARP: Oh, well, we've been here for thirteen years, and we know the way of the country by now.

TAYLOR: Norah's about as green as a new dollar bill, I guess.

SHARP: There's a lot you can't be expected to know at first. I'll say good-night, then, and good luck.

TAYLOR: Well, good-night then, Sid, if you won't stay, and it was real good of you to come and fetch us in the rig.

SHARP: Oh, that's all right. Good-night to you, Mrs. Taylor.

NORAH: Good-night.

[SHARP goes out, gets on the rig, and drives away.]

TAYLOR: I guess it must seem funny to you to hear him call you Mrs. Taylor, eh?

[NORAH gives him a quick look, and represses a little shudder.]

NORAH: Yes.

TAYLOR: How are you getting on with that fire?

NORAH: All right.

TAYLOR: I guess I'll get some water.

[He takes a pail and goes out. He is heard pumping. NORAH gets up, lifts the lamp so as to see better, and looks round. She is pale, and has a frightened look. She does not hear FRANK come in, and starts violently when he speaks to her.]

TAYLOR: Having a look at the shack?

NORAH: *[Putting the lamp down.]* How you startled me.

TAYLOR: What d'you think of it?

NORAH: I don't know.

TAYLOR: I built it with my own hands. Every one of them logs was a tree I cut down myself. You wait till the morning and I'll show you how they're joined together at the corners. There's some neat work there, my girl, I guess.

NORAH: Here's the kettle.

[He pours water into it from the pail, and she puts the kettle on the stove.]

TAYLOR: You'll find some tea in one of them tins on the shelf. Leastways there was some there when I come away. I guess you're hungry.

NORAH: I don't think I am, very. I ate a very good supper in the train.

TAYLOR: I'm glad you call that a good supper. I guess I could wrap up the amount you ate in a postal stamp.

NORAH: *[Smiling.]* I haven't a very large appetite.

TAYLOR: I have. Where's the loaf we got in Winnipeg this afternoon?

NORAH: I'll get it.

TAYLOR: And the butter. You'll bake to-morrow, I reckon.

[NORAH gets a loaf and a piece of butter out of the string bag she brought in with her. She puts them on the table.]

NORAH: Shall I cut you some?

TAYLOR: Yep.

NORAH: Please.

TAYLOR: Please what?

NORAH: [*With a smile.*] Yes, please.

TAYLOR: Oh!

[He gives her a look, and she, a quiet smile on her face, cuts two or three pieces of bread and butter. Then she gets tea out of the tin and puts it in a teapot.]

TAYLOR: I guess you'd better take your hat and coat off.

[*NORAH does so without answering.*] You ain't terribly talkative for a woman, my girl.

NORAH: I haven't got anything to say at the moment.

TAYLOR: Well, I guess it's better to have a wife as talks too little than a wife as talks too much.

NORAH: [*With her tongue in her cheek.*] I suppose absolute perfection is rare—in women, poor wretches.

TAYLOR: What's that?

NORAH: I was only amusing myself with a reflection.

[TAYLOR takes off his coat and appears in a grey sweater. He sits down in the rocking-chair.]

TAYLOR: I guess there's no place like home. You get a bit fed up with hiring out. Ed was O.K., I reckon, but it ain't like being your own boss.

NORAH: [*Pointing.*] What's through there?

TAYLOR: Oh, that's the bedroom. Like to have a look?

NORAH: No.

TAYLOR: When I built the shack I fixed it up so as it would do when I got married. Sid Sharp asked me what in hell I wanted to divide it up in half for, but I guess women like little luxuries like that.

NORAH: Like what?

TAYLOR: Like having a room to sleep in and a room to live in.

NORAH: Here's the bread and butter. Will you have some syrup?

TAYLOR: Sure.

[He gets up and sits down at the table.]

NORAH: That water ought to be boiling by now? What about milk?

TAYLOR: That's one of the things you'll have to do without till I can afford to buy a cow.

NORAH: I can't drink tea without milk.

TAYLOR: You try. Say, can you milk a cow?

NORAH: IP No.

TAYLOR: Then it's just as well I ain't got one.

NORAH: You're a philosopher. *[She lifts the cover off the kettle and looks at it, then pours some water into the teapot and sets it down on the table.]* Is there a candle? I'll just get one or two things out of my box.

TAYLOR: Ain't you going to sit down and have a cup of tea?

NORAH: I don't want any, thanks.

TAYLOR: Sit down, my girl.

NORAH: Why?

TAYLOR: *[Smiling.]* Because I tell you to.

NORAH: *[Quite pleasantly.]* I don't think you'd better tell me to do things.

TAYLOR: Then I ask you. You ain't going to refuse the first favour I've asked you?

NORAH: *[With a pretty smile.]* Of course not. *[She sits down.]* There.

TAYLOR: Now pour out my tea for me, will you? *[He watches her do it.]* It is rum seeing my wife sitting down at my table and pouring out tea for me.

NORAH: Is it pleasant?

TAYLOR: Sure. Now have some yourself, my girl. You'll soon get used to drinking it without milk. And I guess you'll be able to get some to-morrow from Mrs. Sharp. [NORAH *pours herself out some tea.*] I had a sort of feeling I wanted you and me to have the first meal together in your new home. Just take a bit of the bread and butter. [*He passes over to her a slice and, smiling, she cuts a little piece off and eats it.*] We ain't lost much time, I guess. Why, it's only yesterday you told me not to call you Norah.

NORAH: That was very silly of me. I was in a temper.

TAYLOR: And now we're man and wife.

NORAH: Married in haste with a vengeance.

TAYLOR: Ain't you a bit scared?

NORAH: I? What of? You?

TAYLOR: With Ed on t'other side of Winnipeg, he might just as well be in the Old Country for all the good he can be to you. You might be a bit scared to find yourself alone with a man you don't know.

NORAH: I'm not nervous.

TAYLOR: Good for you.

NORAH: You did give me a fright, though. When I asked you if you'd take me, I suppose it was only about fifteen seconds before you answered, but it seemed like ten minutes. I thought you might refuse.

TAYLOR: I was thinking.

NORAH: [*Smiling.*] Counting up my good points and setting them against the bad ones?

TAYLOR: No, I was thinking you wouldn't have asked me like that if you hadn't—despised me.

[NORAH, a little taken aback, gives him a quick look, but she tries to pass it off lightly.]

NORAH: I don't know what makes you think that.

TAYLOR: Well, I don't know how you could have put it more plainly that my name was mud.

NORAH: Why didn't you refuse, then?

TAYLOR: I guess I'm not a nervous fellow, either.

NORAH: [*With a twinkle in her eye.*] And women are scarce in Manitoba.

TAYLOR: I always fancied an Englishwoman. They make the best wives when they've been licked into shape.

NORAH: [*Frankly amused.*] Are you proposing to attempt that operation on me?

TAYLOR: You're clever. I guess a hint or two is about all you'll want.

NORAH: It embarrasses me when you pay me compliments.

TAYLOR: I'll take you round and show you the land tomorrow. I ain't done all the clearing yet, so there'll be plenty of work for the winter. I want to have a hundred acres to sow next year. And then if I get a good crop I've a mind to take another quarter. You can't make it pay really withuot you've got half a section. And it's a tough proposition when you ain't got capital.

NORAH: I didn't think I was marrying a millionaire.

TAYLOR: Never mind, my girl, you shan't live in a shack long I promise you. It's the greatest country in the world. We only want three good crops and you shall have a brick house same as you lived in at home.

NORAH: I wonder what they're doing in England now.

TAYLOR: Well, I guess they're asleep.

NORAH: When I think of England I always think of it at tea-time. [*She looks at the tea-things they have just used.*] Miss Wickham had a beautiful old silver tea-pot—George II—and she was awfully proud of it. And she was very proud of her tea-set—it was old Worcester—and she wouldn't let anyone wash the things but . . . And two

or three times a week an old Indian judge came in to tea, and he used to talk to me about the East—oh, why did you make me think of it all?

TAYLOR: The past is dead and gone, my girl. We've got the future.

NORAH: [*Paying no attention to his words.*] One never knows when one's well off, does one? It's madness to think of what's gone for ever.

TAYLOR: I wish we'd got a drop of liquor here so as we could drink one another's health. But as we ain't you'd better give me a kiss instead.

NORAH: [*Lightly.*] I'm not very fond of kissing.

TAYLOR: [*With a smile.*] It ain't generally an acquired taste, but I guess you're peculiar.

NORAH: It looks like it.

TAYLOR: Come, my girl, you didn't even kiss me after we was married.

NORAH: [*In a perfectly friendly way.*] Isn't a hint enough for you? Why do you force me to say everything in so many words?

TAYLOR: It seems to me it wants a few words to make it plain when a woman refuses to give her husband a kiss.

NORAH: Do sit down, there's a good fellow, and I'll tell you one or two things.

TAYLOR: That's terribly kind of you. [*He sinks back into the rocking-chair.*] Have you any choice of seats?

NORAH: You've taken the only one that's tolerably comfortable. I think there's nothing to choose between the others.

TAYLOR: Nothing.

NORAH: I think we'd better fix things up before we go any further.

TAYLOR: Sure.

NORAH: You gave me to understand very plainly that you wanted a wife in order to get a general servant without having to pay her wages. Wages are high in Canada.

TAYLOR: That was the way you put it.

NORAH: Baching isn't very comfortable.

TAYLOR: Not very.

NORAH: You wanted someone to cook and bake for you, wash, sweep and mend. I offered to come and do all that. It never struck me for an instant that there was any possibility of your expecting anything else of me.

TAYLOR: Then you're a damned fool, my girl.

NORAH: [*Firing up.*] D'you mind not saying things like that to me?

TAYLOR: [*Good-humouredly.*] I guess I shall have to say a good many things like that before we've done.

NORAH: I asked you to marry me only because I couldn't stay in the shack without.

TAYLOR: I guess you asked me to marry you because you was in a hell of a temper. You wanted to get away from Ed's farm right then, and you didn't care what you did so long as you quit. But you was darned sorry for what you'd done by the time you'd packed your box.

NORAH: [*Frigidly.*] What makes you think that?

TAYLOR: Why, when you come back in the kitchen you was as white as a sheet. You wanted to say you'd changed your mind, but your darned pride wouldn't let you.

NORAH: I wouldn't have stayed on in that house for anything in the world.

TAYLOR: And this morning, when I called for you at the Y.W.C.A., you wanted to say you wouldn't marry me. You tried to speak the words, but they wouldn't come. When you shook hands with me your hand was like ice.

NORAH: I was nervous for a moment. After all, one isn't married every day of one's life, is one?

TAYLOR: If I hadn't shown you the licence and the ring, I guess you wouldn't have done it. You hadn't the nerve to back out of it then.

NORAH: I hadn't slept a wink all night. I kept on turning it over in my mind. I was frightened at what I'd done. But I didn't know a soul in Winnipeg. I hadn't anywhere to go. I had four dollars in my pocket. I had to go through with it.

TAYLOR: You took pretty good stock of me in the train on the way here, I guess.

NORAH: [*Recovering herself.*] What makes you think so?

TAYLOR: Well, I felt you was looking at me a good deal. It wasn't hard to see that you was turning me over in your mind. What conclusion did you come to?

NORAH: You see, I lived all those years with an old lady. I know very little about men.

TAYLOR: I guessed that.

NORAH: I came to the conclusion that you were a decent fellow. I thought you would be kind to me.

TAYLOR: Bouquets are just flying around. Have you got anything more to say to me?

NORAH: No.

TAYLOR: Then just get me my pouch, will you? I guess it's in the pocket of my coat.

[She hesitates a moment, looks at him, then gets it.]

NORAH: Here you are.

TAYLOR: [*With his tongue in his cheek.*] I thought you was going to tell me I could darned well get it myself.

NORAH: I don't very much like being ordered about.

TAYLOR: You never paid much attention to me till to-day, I reckon.

NORAH: I was always polite to you.

TAYLOR: Very. But I was the hired man, and you never let me forget it. You thought yourself a darned sight better than me because you could play the piano and speak French. But we ain't got a piano, and there ain't anyone as speaks French nearer than Winnipeg.

NORAH: What are you driving at?

TAYLOR: Parlour tricks ain't much good on the prairie. They're like dollar bills up in Hudson Bay. Tobacco's the only thing you can trade with an Esquimaux. You can't cook very well, you don't know how to milk a cow—why, you can't even harness a horse.

NORAH: Are you regretting your bargain already?

TAYLOR: No, I guess I can teach you. But if I was you I wouldn't put on any frills. We shall get along O.K., I guess, when we've shaken down.

NORAH: You'll find I'm perfectly capable of taking care of myself.

TAYLOR: [*Ignoring the remark.*] When two people live together in a shack there's got to be a deal of give and take on both sides. As long as you do what I tell you you'll be all right.

NORAH: [*With a smile.*] It's unfortunate that when anyone tells me to do a thing I have an irresistible desire not to do it.

TAYLOR: I guess I tumbled to that. You must get over it.

NORAH: You've talked to me once or twice in a way I don't like. I think we shall get on better if you *ask* me to do things.

TAYLOR: Don't forget that I can *make* you do them.

NORAH: [*Amused.*] How?

TAYLOR: Well, I'm stronger than you are.

NORAH: A man can hardly use force in his dealings with a woman.

TAYLOR: Oh?

NORAH: You seem surprised.

TAYLOR: What's going to prevent him?

NORAH: [*With a little laugh.*] Don't be so silly.

[*He gives her a look and then smiles quietly to himself.*]

TAYLOR: Well, I'm going to unpack my grip. [*Pointing to the tea-things.*] Wash up them things.

NORAH: [*With a slight shrug of the shoulders.*] I'll wash them up in the morning.

TAYLOR: Wash 'em up now, my girl. You'll find the only way to keep things clean is to wash 'em the moment you've done with them. [*NORAH looks at him with a slight smile on her face, but does not move.*] Did you hear what I said?

NORAH: I did.

TAYLOR: Why don't you do as I tell you?

NORAH: [*Smiling.*] Because I don't choose.

TAYLOR: You ain't taken long to try it out.

NORAH: They say there's no time like the present.

TAYLOR: Are you going to wash up them things?

NORAH: No.

[*He looks at her for a moment, then gets up, pours water into a pail and puts a ragged discloth on the table.*]

TAYLOR: Are you going to wash up them things?

NORAH: No.

TAYLOR: D'you want me to make you?

NORAH: How can you do that?

TAYLOR: I'll show you.

NORAH: I'll just get out these rugs, shall I? I expect it gets very cold towards morning.

[*She gets up and goes over to a holdall and begins unstrapping it.*]

TAYLOR: Norah.

NORAH: Yes.

TAYLOR: Come here.

NORAH: Why?

TAYLOR: Because I tell you.

[She looks at him, but does not move. He goes over to her and is about to seize her wrist.]

NORAH: You daren't touch me.

TAYLOR: Who told you that?

NORAH: Have you forgotten that I'm a woman?

TAYLOR: No, I haven't. That's why I'm going to make you do as I tell you. If you was a man I mightn't be able to. Come now. *[He makes a movement to take her by the arm, but she slips away from him and quickly boxes his ears. He stops.]* That was a darned silly thing to do.

NORAH: What did you expect?

TAYLOR: I expected you was cleverer than to hit me. You see, when it comes to—to muscle, I guess I've got the bulge on you.

NORAH: I'm not frightened of you.

TAYLOR: Now come and wash up these things.

NORAH: I won't.

TAYLOR: Come on.

[He takes her wrists and tries to drag her to the table. She struggles with him, but cannot release herself. She kicks him as he drags her to the table.]

NORAH: Let me go.

TAYLOR: Come on now, my girl. What's the good of making a darned fuss about it?

NORAH: You brute, how dare you touch me! You'll never

force me to do anything. Let go! Let go! Let go!

*[As they reach the table she bends down and bites him.
Instinctively he releases her.]*

TAYLOR: Gee, what sharp teeth you've got.

NORAH: You cad! You cad!

TAYLOR: *[Looking at his hand.]* I never thought you'd bite.
That ain't much like a lady.

NORAH: You filthy cad to hit a woman.

TAYLOR: Gee, I didn't hit you. You smacked my face and kicked my shins, and you bit my hand. And then you say I hit you.

NORAH: *[With all her passion.]* You beast! I hate you.

TAYLOR: I don't care about that so long as you wash them cups.

NORAH: Look.

[With a sudden sweep of the arm she brushes them off the table, and they fall on the floor and break.]

TAYLOR: That's a pity. We're terribly short of crockery.
We shall have to drink our tea out of tins now.

NORAH: I said I wouldn't wash them and I haven't washed them.

TAYLOR: They don't need it now, I guess.

NORAH: I think I've won.

TAYLOR: *[With a smile.]* Sure. Now take the broom and sweep up all the darned mess you've made.

NORAH: I won't.

TAYLOR: Look here, my girl, I guess I've had about enough of your nonsense. You do as you're told and look sharp about it.

NORAH: You can kill me if you like.

TAYLOR: What's the good of that? Women are scarce in Manitoba. . . . Here's the broom.

NORAH: If you want that mess swept up you can sweep it up yourself.

TAYLOR: You make me tired. [*He puts the broom into her hands, but she flings it violently away.*] Look here, if you don't clean up that mess at once, I'll give you the biggest hiding you've ever had in your life.

NORAH: [*Scornfully.*] You?

TAYLOR: [*Nodding his head.*] Yours truly. I've done with larking now.

[He turns up the sleeves of his sweater. Suddenly she bursts into loud cries.]

NORAH: Help! Help! Help!

TAYLOR: What's the good of that? There ain't no one within a mile of us. Listen.

[For a moment they are both silent as they listen to the silence of the prairie.]

NORAH: If you touch me I'll have you up for cruelty. There are laws to protect me.

TAYLOR: I don't care a curse for the laws. I know I'm going to be master here. And if I tell you to do a thing you've darned well got to do it because I can make you. Now stop fooling. Pick up that crockery and get the broom.

NORAH: I won't. [*He strides up and is just about to catch hold of her when she shrinks back. She sees he is in earnest. She is terrified by his look.*] No, don't. Don't hurt me.

TAYLOR: [*He stops and looks at her.*] I guess there's only one law here, and that's the law of the strongest. I don't know nothing about cities. Perhaps men and women are equal there. But on the prairie a man's master because he's bigger and stronger than a woman.

NORAH: Frank.

TAYLOR: Blast you, don't talk!

[NORAH pauses, struggling between her pride and her fear. She will not look at her husband. She feels that he is getting impatient. At last, slowly, she bends down and picks up the teapot, the cups and saucers, and puts them on the table. Then she sinks into the chair and bursts into tears. He watches her with a slight smile on his face, but not unkindly.]

NORAH: Oh, I'm so unhappy.

TAYLOR: [Without any anger in his voice.] Come on, my girl, don't shirk the rest of it. [She looks up and sees the mess of spilt tea on the floor. She gets up slowly, keeping her face away from him, and picks up the broom. She sweeps up. When she has finished she puts the broom in the corner. He watches her all the time. Then she takes up her hat and coat and starts to put them on.] What are you doing?

NORAH: I've done what you made me do. Now I'm going.

TAYLOR: Where?

NORAH: What do I care so long as I get away?

TAYLOR: You ain't under the impression that there's a first-class hotel round the corner, are you? because there ain't.

NORAH: I'll go to the Sharps.

TAYLOR: I guess they're in bed and asleep by now.

NORAH: I can wake them.

TAYLOR: You'd never find your way. It's pitch dark.

NORAH: I'll sleep out of doors, then.

TAYLOR: On the prairie? Why, you'd freeze to death.

NORAH: What does it matter to you whether I live or die?

TAYLOR: It matters a great deal. Women are scarce in Manitoba.

NORAH: Are you going to prevent me from going?

TAYLOR: Sure.

[He stands in front of the door and faces her.]

NORAH: You can't keep me here against my will. If I don't go to-night, I can go to-morrow.

TAYLOR: To-morrow's a long way off.

[She gives a start and looks at him with staring, terrified eyes, her throat is dry with terror.]

NORAH: Frank. What d'you mean?

TAYLOR: I don't know what silly fancies you had in your head. When I married you I intended that you should be a proper wife to me.

NORAH: But . . . but *[She can hardly speak.]* But you understood. *[He does not answer. At last she collects herself. She tries to talk calmly and reasonably.]* I'm sorry for the way I behaved, Frank. It was childish of me to struggle with you. You irritated me by the way you spoke.

TAYLOR: Oh, I don't mind. I don't know much about women and I guess they're queer. We had to fix things up sometime and I guess there was no harm in getting it over right now.

NORAH: You've beaten me all along the line and I'm in your power. Have mercy on me.

TAYLOR: I guess you won't have much cause to complain.

NORAH: I married you in a fit of temper. It was very stupid of me. I'm very sorry that I—that I've been all this trouble to you. Won't you let me go?

TAYLOR: No, I can't do that.

NORAH: I'm no good to you. You've told me that I'm useless. I can't do any of the things that you want a wife to do. You can't be so hard-hearted as to make me pay with all my life for one moment's madness.

TAYLOR: What good would it do if I let you go? Will you go to Gertie and ask her to take you back again? You've got too much pride for that.

NORAH: I don't think I've got much pride left.

TAYLOR: Don't you think you'd better give it a try?

NORAH: All the life was so strange to me. In England they think it's so different from what it really is. I thought I should have a horse to ride. I expected dances and tennis parties. And when I came out I was so out of it. I felt in the way. And yesterday they drove me frantic so that I felt I couldn't stay another moment in that house. It was only an impulse. I made a mistake. I didn't know what I was doing. You can't have the heart to take advantage of it.

TAYLOR: I knew you was making a mistake, but that was your look out. When I sell a man a horse he can look it over for himself, but I ain't obliged to tell him its faults.

NORAH: D'you mean to say that after I've begged you almost on my knees to let me go you'll force me to stay?

TAYLOR: Sure.

NORAH: Oh, I'm so unhappy.

TAYLOR: Perhaps you won't be when you get used to it.

NORAH: [*Desperately.*] Oh, why did I ever walk into this trap?

TAYLOR: Come, my girl, let us let bygones be bygones and give me a kiss.

[She looks at him for a moment.]

NORAH: I'm not in love with you.

TAYLOR: I guessed that.

NORAH: And you're not in love with me.

TAYLOR: You're a woman and I'm a man.

NORAH: D'you want me to tell you in so many words that you're physically repellent to me? The thought of letting you kiss me horrifies and disgusts me.

TAYLOR: [*Good-humouredly.*] Thank you.

NORAH: Look at your hands. It gives me goose-flesh when you touch me.

TAYLOR: Cutting down trees, diggin', looking after horses, don't leave them very white and smooth.

NORAH: Let me go. Let me go.

[TAYLOR *changes his manner, which has been quite good-humoured, and speaks more sharply and with a certain stern force.*

TAYLOR: See here, my girl—you was educated like a lady and spent your life doing nothing—a lady's companion, wasn't you—taking a little dawg out for a walk of a morning and combing out his pretty little coat? And you look upon yourself as a darned sight better than me. I never had no schooling, and it's a hell of a job for me to write a letter, but since I was so high I've earned my living. I guess I've been all over this country. I've been a trapper and I've worked on the railroad, and for two years I've been a freighter. I guess I've done pretty near everything but serve in a store. Now you just get busy and forget all the nonsense you've got in your head. You're nothing but an ignorant woman and I'm your master. I'm going to do what I like with you, and if you don't submit willingly, by God I'll take you as the trappers in the old days used to take the squaws.

[*He steps towards her, and she, escaping from him, seizes his gun, which is lying against the wall. She lifts it and aims at him.*

NORAH: If you move I'll kill you.

TAYLOR: [*Stopping suddenly.*] You daren't.

NORAH: Unless you open the door and let me go I'll shoot you. I'll shoot you.

TAYLOR: [*Advancing one step.*] Shoot, then.

[*She pulls the trigger. A click is heard, but nothing more.*

TAYLOR: Gee whiz, you meant it.

NORAH: [*Aghast.*] It wasn't loaded.

TAYLOR: Of course it wasn't loaded. D'you think I'd have stood there and told you to shoot if it had been? I guess I ain't thinking of committing suicide.

NORAH: And I almost admired you.

TAYLOR: You hadn't got no reason to. There's nothing to admire about a man who stands five feet off a loaded gun that's being aimed at him. He's a darned fool, that's all.

NORAH: [*Throwing the gun aside angrily.*] You were laughing at me. Now I'll never forgive you.

TAYLOR: You'd have had me dead as mutton if that gun had been loaded. You're a sport. I never thought you had it in you.

NORAH: I'll never forgive you.

TAYLOR: You're the girl for me, I guess.

[*Before she is prepared he flings his arms round her and tries to kiss her. She struggles desperately, turning her face away from him.*]

NORAH: Let me alone. I'll kill myself if you touch me.

TAYLOR: I guess you won't.

[*He gives her a resounding kiss on the cheek and lets her go. Sinking into a chair, she puts her hands up to her flaming cheeks.*]

NORAH: Oh, how shameful, how shameful.

[*She sobs in helpless, angry despair. He puts his hand gently on her shoulder.*]

TAYLOR: Hadn't you better cave in, my girl? You've tried your strength against mine and it didn't amount to much. You tried to shoot me and I only made you look a darned fool. I guess you're beat, my girl. There's only one law here, and that's the law of the strongest. You've got to do what I want because I can make you.

NORAH: Haven't you any generosity?

TAYLOR: Not the kind you want, I guess.

NORAH: Oh, I'm so unhappy.

TAYLOR: Listen. [*He puts up his finger and seems to listen intently. She looks at him, but does not speak.*] Listen to the silence. Can't you hear it, the silence of the prairie? Why, we might be the only two people in the world, you and me, here in this shack right out in the prairie. Listen. There ain't a sound. It might be the garden of Eden. What's that about male and female created He them? I guess you're my wife, my girl, and I want you. [*She gives him a sidelong look of terror, but still does not speak. He takes the lamp and goes to the bedroom door. He opens it and, holding the lamp up high, looks at her. Just to do something she takes the dishcloth and rubs the table with it. She wants to gain time.*] I guess it's getting late. You'll be able to have a good clean out to-morrow.

NORAH: To-morrow.

[*A look of shame, fear, anguish, passes over her face, and then, violently, a convulsive shudder runs through her whole body. She puts her hands to her eyes and walks slowly to the door.*

END OF THE THIRD ACT

THE FOURTH ACT

SCENE: *The same as in the previous act, FRANK TAYLOR's shack at Prentice, but there are signs about it of a woman's presence. There is a cloth on the table, and a cushion on the rocking-chair, there are muslin curtains on the window tied back with ribbon, and there are geraniums growing in maple-syrup tins. There is a rough bookshelf against the wall, on which is NORAH's small stock of books. Coloured supplements from the Christmas numbers of illustrated papers are pinned neatly on the walls. The packing-cases which had been used as stools have been replaced by rough chairs which TAYLOR has made with his own hands during the winter. When the door of the shack is opened the blue sky is seen and the prairie. NORAH is arranging mustard flowers in a pudding basin on the table. She wears a serge skirt and a neat shirt-waist; she has a healthier look than before, her face is tanned and she has a higher colour. She hears a sound and looks up. TAYLOR enters.*

NORAH: I didn't know you were about.

TAYLOR: I ain't got much to do to-day. I've been out with Sid Sharp and a man come over from Prentice.

NORAH: Oh!

TAYLOR: [*Noticing the flowers.*] Say, what have you got there?

NORAH: Aren't they pretty? I picked them just now. They're so cheerful.

TAYLOR: [*Drily.*] Very.

NORAH: A few flowers make the shack look so much more bright and cosy.

TAYLOR: [*Looking round him.*] You've made it a real home, Norah. Mrs. Sharp never stops wondering how you done it. Sid was saying only the other day it was because you was a lady. It does make a difference, I guess.

NORAH: [*With a little smile.*] I'm glad you haven't found me quite a hopeless failure.

TAYLOR: I guess I've never been so comfortable in all my life. It's what I always said—when English girls do take to the life they make a better job of it than anybody.

NORAH: What's the man come out from Prentice for?

TAYLOR: [*After a moment's pause.*] I guess you ain't been terribly happy here, my girl.

NORAH: What on earth makes you say that?

TAYLOR: You've got a good memory, I guess, and you ain't ever forgiven me for that first night.

NORAH: [*Looking down.*] I made up my mind very soon that I must accept the consequences of what I'd done. I tried to fall in with your ways.

TAYLOR: You was clever enough to see that I meant to be master in my own house, and I had the strength to do it.

NORAH: [*With a faint smile.*] I've cooked for you and mended your clothes, and I've kept the shack clean. I've been obedient and obliging.

TAYLOR: [*With a little chuckle.*] I guess you hated me sometimes.

NORAH: No one likes being humiliated as you humiliated me.

TAYLOR: Ed's coming out here presently, my girl.

NORAH: Ed who?

TAYLOR: Your brother.

NORAH: [*Astounded.*] Eddie! When?

TAYLOR: Why, right now, I guess. He was in Prentice this morning.

NORAH: How d'you know?

TAYLOR: He phoned over to Sharp's to say he was riding out.

NORAH: Oh, how ripping! Why didn't you tell me before?

TAYLOR: I didn't know.

NORAH: Is that why you asked me if I was happy? I couldn't make out what was the matter with you.

TAYLOR: Well, I guess I thought if you still wanted to quit, Ed's coming would be kind of useful.

NORAH: Why d'you think I want to?

TAYLOR: You ain't been very talkative these months, but I guess it wasn't hard to see you'd have given pretty near anything in the world to quit.

NORAH: I'm not going back to Eddie's farm, if that's what you mean.

TAYLOR: If he comes before I get back, tell him I won't be long. I guess you won't be sorry to do a bit of yarning with him by yourself.

NORAH: You're not under the impression I'm going to say beastly things about you to him?

TAYLOR: No, I guess not. That ain't your sort. P'raps we don't know the best of one another yet, but I reckon we know the worst by now.

NORAH: [*Looking at him sharply.*] Frank, is anything the matter?

TAYLOR: Why, no. Why?

NORAH: You've seemed different the last few days.

TAYLOR: I guess that's only your fancy. I'd better be getting along. Sid and the other fellow are waiting for me.

[*He goes out. NORAH looks at him with a puzzled air, then she gives a touch to the flowers, and gets her work. She sits down at the table and begins to mend a thick woollen sock. Suddenly there is a loud knock at the door. She starts up and runs to open it. EDWARD MARSH is seen standing outside. She gives a cry of delight and flings her arms round his neck. He comes in.*]

NORAH: Eddie! Oh, my dear, I'm so glad to see you.

MARSH: Hulloo there!

NORAH: But how did you come? I never heard a rig.

MARSH: Look.

[She goes to the door and looks out]

NORAH: Why, it's Reggie Hornby. *[Calling.]* Reggie.

HORNBY: *[Outside.]* Hullo!

NORAH: He can put the horse in the lean-to.

MARSH: Yes. *[Calling.]* Reg, give the old lady a feed and put her in the lean-to.

HORNBY: Right-o.

NORAH: Didn't you see Frank? He's only just this moment gone out.

MARSH: No.

NORAH: He'll be in presently. Now, come in. Oh, my dear, it is splendid to see you.

MARSH: You're looking fine, Norah.

NORAH: Have you had dinner?

MARSH: Sure. We got something to eat before we left Prentice.

NORAH: Well, I'll make you a cup of tea.

MARSH: No, I won't have anything, thanks.

NORAH: You're not a real Canadian yet if you refuse a cup of tea when it's offered you. Well, sit down and make yourself comfortable.

MARSH: How are you getting on, Norah?

NORAH: Oh, never mind about me. Tell me about yourself. How's Gertie? And what brought you to this part of the world? And what's Reggie Hornby doing? And is thingamygig still with you? You know, the hired man. What was his name? Trotter, wasn't it? Oh, my dear, don't sit there like a stuffed pig, but speak to me, or I shall shake you.

MARSH: My dear, I can't answer fifteen questions all at once.

NORAH: Oh, Eddie, I'm so glad to see you. You are a duck to come and see me.

MARSH: Let me get a word in edgeways.

NORAH: I won't say another syllable. But for goodness' sake, hurry up. I want to know all sorts of things.

MARSH: Well, the first thing is that I'm expecting to be a happy father in three or four months.

NORAH: Oh, Eddie, I'm so glad. How happy Gertie must be!

MARSH: She doesn't know what to make of it. But I guess she's pleased right enough. She sends you her love and says she hopes you'll follow her example soon.

NORAH: If But you've not told me what you're doing in this part of the world, anyway.

MARSH: Well, when I got Frank's letter about the clearing machine . . .

NORAH: [*Interrupting him.*] Has Frank written to you?

MARSH: Why, yes. Didn't you know? He said there was a clearing machine going cheap at Prentice. I've always thought I could make money down our way if I had one. They say you can clear from three to four acres a day with it. Frank said it was worth my while coming to have a look at it, and he guessed you'd be glad to see me.

NORAH: How funny of him not to say anything to me about it.

MARSH: I expect he wanted to surprise you. Now, how d'you like being a married woman?

NORAH: Oh, all right. Why has Reggie Hornby come with you?

MARSH: D'you know, I've not seen you since you were married.

NORAH: You haven't, have you?

MARSH: I've been a bit anxious about you. That's why, when Frank wrote about the clearing machine, I didn't stop to think about it, but just came.

NORAH: It was very nice of you. But why has Reggie Hornby come?

MARSH: Oh, he's going back to England.

NORAH: Is he?

MARSH: Yes, he got them to send him his passage at last. His ship doesn't sail till next week, and he said he might just as well stop off here and say good-bye to you.

NORAH: How has he been getting on?

MARSH: What do you expect? He looks upon work as something that only damned fools do. Where's Frank?

NORAH: Oh, he's out with Sid Sharp. That's our neighbour. He has the farm you passed on your way here.

MARSH: Getting on all right with him, Norah?

NORAH: Of course. What's that boy doing all this time? He *is* slow, isn't he?

MARSH: It's a great change for you, this, after the sort of life you've been used to.

NORAH: [*To change the topic.*] I was rather hoping you'd have some letters for me. I haven't had any for a long time.

MARSH: There now, I've got a head like a sieve. Two came by the last mail and I didn't send them on because I was coming myself.

NORAH: You haven't forgotten them?

MARSH: No, here they are.

NORAH: [*Reading the addresses.*] They don't look very exciting. One's from Agnes Pringle. She was a lady's companion that I used to know in Tunbridge Wells. And the other's from Mr. Wynne.

MARSH: Who's he?

NORAH: Oh, he was Miss Wickham's solicitor. He wrote to me once before to say he hoped I was getting on all right. [*Putting the letters on the table.*] I don't think I want to hear from people in England any more.

MARSH: My dear, why d'you say that?

NORAH: It's no good thinking of the past, is it?

MARSH: Aren't you going to read your letters?

NORAH: Not now. I'll read them when I'm alone.

MARSH: Don't mind me.

NORAH: It's so silly of me, but letters from England always make me cry.

MARSH: [*Looking at her sharply.*] Norah, aren't you happy here?

NORAH: Yes, why shouldn't I be?

MARSH: Why haven't you written to me once since you were married?

NORAH: I hadn't got much to say. [*With a smile.*] And after all, I'd been practically turned out of your house.

MARSH: [*Puzzled.*] I don't know what to make of you.

NORAH: [*Nervous and almost exasperated.*] Oh, don't cross-examine me, there's a dear.

MARSH: Frank Taylor's kind to you and all that sort of thing, isn't he?

NORAH: Quite.

MARSH: When I asked you to come and stay on the farm I thought it wouldn't be long before you married, but I didn't expect you'd marry one of the hired men.

NORAH: Oh, my dear, don't worry about me.

MARSH: It's all very fine to say that. You've got no one in the world belonging to you but me, and when—when

our mother died, she said: You'll take care of Norah, won't you, Eddie?

NORAH: [*With a sob in her voice.*] Oh, don't, don't.

MARSH: Norah.

NORAH: [*With an effort at self-possession.*] We've never quarrelled since the first day I came here. Here's Reggie.

[*She turns to him with relief. HORNBY is dressed in a blue serge suit and again looks like a well-groomed English gentleman.*

NORAH: [*Gaily.*] I was wondering what on earth you were doing with yourself.

HORNBY: [*Shaking hands with her.*] I say, this is a very swell shack you've got.

NORAH: I've tried to make it look pretty and homelike.

[*MARSH catches sight of the bowl of mustard flowers.*

MARSH: Hulloo, what's this?

NORAH: Aren't they pretty? I've only just picked them. Mustard flowers.

MARSH: We call it weed. Have you got much of it.

NORAH: Oh yes, lots. Why?

MARSH: Oh, nothing.

NORAH: [*To HORNBY.*] I hear you're going home.

HORNBY: Yes, I'm fed up with God's own country. Nature never intended me to be an agricultural labourer.

NORAH: What are you going to do now?

HORNBY: [*With immense conviction.*] Loaf!

NORAH: [*Amused.*] Won't you get bored?

HORNBY: I'm never bored. It amuses me to look at other people do things. I should hate my fellow creatures to be idle.

NORAH: [*With a faint smile.*] I should have thought one could do more with life than lounge about clubs and play cards with people who don't play as well as oneself.

HORNBY: I quite agree with you. I've been thinking things over very seriously this winter. And I'm going to look out for a middle-aged widow with money who'll adopt me.

NORAH: I remember that you have decided views about the White Man's Burden.

HORNBY: All I want is to get through life comfortably. I don't mean to do a stroke more work than I'm obliged to, and I'm going to have the very best time I can get.

NORAH: [*Smiling.*] I'm sure you will.

HORNBY: The moment I get back to London I'm going to stand myself a slap-up dinner at the Ritz, then I shall go and see a musical comedy at the Gaiety, and after that I'll have a slap-up supper at Romano's. England, with all thy faults, I love thee well.

NORAH: I suppose it's being alone with the prairie all these months, things which used to seem rather funny and clever—well, I see them quite differently now.

HORNBY: [*Coolly.*] I'm afraid you don't altogether approve of me.

NORAH: [*Not disagreeably.*] You haven't got pluck.

HORNBY: I don't know about that. I expect I have as much as anyone else, only I don't make a fuss about it.

NORAH: Oh, pluck to stand up and let yourself be shot at—I daresay. But pluck to do the same monotonous thing day after day, plain, honest, hard work—you haven't got that. You're a failure, and the worst of it is, you're not ashamed of it. It fills you with self-satisfaction.

HORNBY: Rule Britannia, and what price the Union Jack?

NORAH: [*With a laugh.*] You're incorrigible.

HORNBY: I am. . . . I suppose there's nothing you want me to take home. I shall be going down to Tunbridge Wells to see mother. Got any messages?

NORAH: I don't know that I have. Eddie has just brought

me a couple of letters. I'll have a look at them. [*She opens Miss Pringle's letter, reads two or three lines, and gives a cry.*] Oh!

MARSH: What's the matter?

NORAH: What does she mean? [*Reading.*] "I've just heard from Mr. Wynne about your good luck, and I have another piece of good news for you." [*She puts the letter down and quickly opens the solicitor's. She takes out of the envelope a letter and a cheque. She glances at it.*] A cheque—for five hundred pounds. . . . Oh, Eddie, listen. [*Reading.*] "Dear Miss Marsh,—I have had several interviews with Mr. Wickham in relation to the late Miss Wickham's estate, and I ventured to represent to him that you had been very badly treated. Now that everything is settled he wishes to send you the enclosed cheque as some recognition of your devoted service to his late aunt. . . ." Five hundred pounds!

MARSH: That's a very respectable sum.

HORNBY: I could do with that myself.

NORAH: I've never had so much money in all my life.

MARSH: But what's the other piece of good news that Miss Stick-in-the-mud talks about?

NORAH: Oh, I forgot. [*She takes Miss Pringle's letter up again and begins to read it.*] ". . . Piece of good news for you. I write at once so that you may make your plans accordingly. I told you in my last letter of my sister-in-law's sudden death, and now my brother is very anxious that I should live with him. So I am leaving Mrs. Hubbard, and she wishes me to say that if you care to have my place as her companion she will be very pleased to have you. I have been with her for thirteen years, and she has always treated me like an equal. She is very considerate, and there is practically nothing to do but to exercise the dogs. The salary is thirty-five pounds a year."

MARSH: Both letters are addressed to Miss Marsh. Don't they know you're married?

NORAH: No. I never told them.

HORNBY: What a lark! You could go back to Tunbridge Wells, and none of the old frumps would ever know you'd been married.

[NORAH gives a sudden start when he says this and stares at him with wide-open eyes. There is a moment's pause.]

MARSH: Just clear out for a minute, Reg. I want to speak to Norah.

HORNBY: Right-o.

[He goes out.]

MARSH: Norah, d'you want to clear out?

NORAH: What on earth makes you think that?

MARSH: You gave him such a look when he mentioned it.

NORAH: I'm bewildered. Did Frank know anything about this?

MARSH: My dear, how could he?

NORAH: It's so extraordinary. He was talking about my going away just now.

MARSH: [Quickly.] Why?

NORAH: Oh!

[She realises that she has betrayed the secret inadvertently.]

MARSH: Norah, for goodness' sake tell me if there's anything the matter. After all, it's now or never. You're keeping back something from me. Aren't you getting on well together?

NORAH: [In a low voice.] Not very.

MARSH: Why didn't you let me know?

NORAH: I was ashamed.

MARSH: But you say he's kind to you.

NORAH: I've got nothing to reproach him with.

MARSH: I felt that something was wrong. I knew you couldn't be happy with him. A girl like you and a hired man. The whole thing was horrible. Thank God I'm here and you've got this chance.

NORAH: What d'you mean?

MARSH: You're not fit for this life. You've got a chance to go back to England. For God's sake take it. In six months all you've gone through here will seem nothing but a hideous dream. [*He is suddenly struck by the expression of her face.*] Norah, what's the matter?

NORAH: [*Tragically.*] I don't know.

[*HORNBY comes in again.*]

HORNBY: I say, here's someone coming to see you.

NORAH: Me? [*She goes to the door and looks out.*] Oh, it's Mrs. Sharp. Whatever brings her here on foot? She never walks a step if she can help it. She's the wife of my neighbour. . . . Good-afternoon, Mrs. Sharp.

[*MRS. SHARP enters. She is a middle-aged woman, red in the face, stout and rather short of breath. She wears an old sun-bonnet, a faded shirt-waist, none too clean, and a rather battered skirt.*]

NORAH: Come right in.

MRS. SHARP: Good-afternoon to you, Mrs. Taylor. I'm all in a perspiration. I've not walked so far in months.

NORAH: This is my brother.

MRS. SHARP: Your brother! Is that who it is?

NORAH: [*Smiling.*] It seems to surprise you.

MRS. SHARP: I was so anxious, I couldn't stay indoors. I went out to see if I could catch sight of Sid, and I walked on and then I saw the rig what's outside, and it give me such a turn, I thought it was the inspector. I just had to come. I was that nervous.

NORAH: Is anything the matter?

MRS. SHARP: You're not going to tell me you don't know about it? Why, Sid and Frank haven't been talking about anything else since Frank found it.

NORAH: Found what?

MRS. SHARP: The weed.

MARSH: [*With a slight gesture towards the pudding bowl of flowers.*] You have got it, then?

MRS. SHARP: It's worse at Taylor's. But we've got it too.

NORAH: What does it mean?

MRS. SHARP: We can't make out who reported us. It isn't as if we had any enemies.

MARSH: Oh, there's always someone to report you. No one's going to take the risk of letting it get on his own land.

MRS. SHARP: [*Looking at the mustard blossom.*] And she has them in the house as if they was flowers.

NORAH: Tell me what she means, Eddie.

MARSH: My dear, these pretty little flowers which you've picked to make your shack look bright and homelike—they may mean ruin.

NORAH: Eddiel

MARSH: You must have heard us talk about the weed. We farmers have three enemies to fight—frost, hail, and weed.

MRS. SHARP: We was hailed out last year. Lost our crop. We never got a dollar for it. And if we lose it this year too—why, we may just as well quit.

MARSH: When it gets into your crop you've got to report it, and if you don't one of the neighbours will. And then they send an inspector along, and if he condemns it, why you just have to destroy the crop, and all your year's work is lost. You're lucky if you've got a bit of money in the bank and can go on till the next crop comes along.

MRS. SHARP: We've only got a quarter section and five children. It's not much money you can save then.

MARSH: Are they out with the inspector now?

MRS. SHARP: Yes. He come out from Prentice this morning.

MARSH: This is a bad job for Frank.

MRS. SHARP: Oh, he hasn't got the mouths to feed that we have. He can hire out again. But what's to become of us?

NORAH: I wonder why he never told me.

MRS. SHARP: I guess he's in the habit of keeping his troubles to himself and you've not taught him different yet.

[NORAH gives her a quick look, but seeing the woman is all on edge with nervousness does not answer.]

MARSH: You must hope for the best, Mrs. Sharp.

MRS. SHARP: Sid says we've only got it in one place, but perhaps he's only saying it so I shouldn't worry. You know what them inspectors are. They don't lose nothing by it. It don't matter to them if you starve all the winter.

[She gives a sob and heavy tears roll down her cheeks.]

NORAH: Oh don't—don't cry, Mrs. Sharp. After all, it may be all right.

MARSH: They won't condemn the crop unless it's very bad. Too many people have got their eyes on it. The machine agent, the loan company.

MRS. SHARP: What with the hail that comes and hails you out and the frost that kills your crop just when you're beginning to count on it, and the weed—I can't bear it any more. If we lose this crop I won't go on. I'll make Sid sell out and we'll go home. We'll take a little shop somewhere. That's what I wanted to do from the beginning, but Sid—he had his heart set on farming.

NORAH: You couldn't go back now. You'd never be happy in a little shop. And if you'd stayed in England you'd

have been always at the beck and call of somebody else. And you own the land. You couldn't do that in England. When you come out of your door and look at the growing wheat, aren't you proud to think it's yours?

MRS. SHARP: You don't know what I've had to put up with. When the children came, only once I had a doctor. The other times Sid was the only help I had. I might have been an animal. I wish I'd never come to this country.

NORAH: How can you say that! Your children are strong and healthy. Why, they'll be able to help you in the work soon. You've given them a chance that they'd never have got at home.

MRS. SHARP: Oh, it's all very well for them. They'll have it easy. I know that. But we've had to pay for it, Sid and me.

NORAH: You see, you were the first. It's bitter work opening up a new country and perhaps it's others who reap the harvest. But I wonder if those who start don't get a reward that the later comers never dream of.

MARSH: She's right there, Mrs. Sharp. I shall never forget what I felt when I saw my first crop spring up and thought that never since the world began had wheat grown on that little bit of ground. . . . I wouldn't go back to England now for anything in the world. I couldn't breathe.

MRS. SHARP: You're a man. You have the best of it and all the credit.

NORAH: People don't know. You mustn't blame them. It's only those who've lived out on the prairie who know that the hardships of opening up a new country fall on the women. But the men who are their husbands, they know.

MARSH: I guess they do, Mrs. Sharp.

[NORAH, on her knees beside her, strokes MRS. SHARP's hands. MRS. SHARP gives her a grateful smile.]

MRS. SHARP: Thank you for speaking kindly to me, my dear. I'm that nervous, I hardly know what I'm saying.

NORAH: Sid and Frank will be in here in a minute, surely.

MRS. SHARP: And you're right, my dear, I couldn't go back any more. If we lose our crop, well, we must wait till next year. We shan't starve. One's got to take the rough with the smooth, and take it all in all, it's a good country.

[FRANK TAYLOR *comes in*.

NORAH: Frank.

MRS. SHARP: [*Starting to her feet.*] Where's Sid?

TAYLOR: Why he's up at your place. Hulloo, Ed. I saw you coming along in the rig. Morning, Reg. I wasn't expecting to see you.

HORNBY: Pleasant surprise for you.

MRS. SHARP: What's happened? Tell me what's happened.

NORAH: Mrs. Sharp came here because she was so anxious.

TAYLOR: [*Cheerfully.*] Oh, you're all right.

MRS. SHARP: [*With a gasp.*] We are?

TAYLOR: Sure. Only a few acres has got to go. That won't hurt you.

MRS. SHARP: Thank God for that. And it's going to be the best crop we ever had. It's the finest country in the world.

TAYLOR: You'd better be getting back. Sid's taken the inspector up to give him some dinner.

MRS. SHARP: He hasn't? That's just like Sid. It's a mercy there's plenty. I'll be getting along right now.

NORAH: Don't walk. There's Eddie's rig. Reggie will drive you over.

MRS. SHARP: Oh, thank you kindly. I'm not used to walking so much and I'm tired out. Good-afternoon, Mrs. Taylor.

NORAH: Good-bye. Reggie, you don't mind driving Mrs. Sharp back? It's only just over a mile.

HORNBY: Not a bit.

MARSH: I'll come and help you put the mare in.

[Mrs. SHARP and HORNBY go out.]

MARSH: I guess it's a relief to you now you know, Frank.

TAYLOR: Terrible. . . . I'd like to have a talk with you presently, Ed.

MARSH: Right you are. [*He goes.*]

NORAH: I'm so thankful it's all right. Poor thing, she was in such a state.

TAYLOR: They've got five children to feed. I guess it makes a powerful lot of difference to them.

NORAH: I wish you'd told me before. I felt that something was worrying you and I didn't know what.

TAYLOR: If I saved the crop there didn't seem any use fussing, and if I didn't you'd know quite soon enough.

NORAH: How could you bear to let me put the flowers here?

TAYLOR: I guess I didn't mind if it made you happy. You didn't know they was only a weed. You thought them darned pretty.

NORAH: [*With a little smile.*] It was very kind of you, Frank.

TAYLOR: I guess it's queer that a darned little flower like that should be able to do so much damage.

NORAH: Why didn't you tell me you'd written to Eddie?

TAYLOR: I guess I forgot.

NORAH: Frank, Eddie brought me some letters from home to-day. I've had the offer of a job in England.

[FRANK is just going to make an exclamation, but immediately controls himself and answers quite quietly.]

TAYLOR: Geel I guess you'll take that.

NORAH: It's funny that you should have been talking just now of my going away.

TAYLOR: Very.

NORAH: [*A little surprised at his manner.*] Have you any objection?

TAYLOR: I guess it wouldn't make a powerful lot of difference to you if I had.

NORAH: What makes you think that?

TAYLOR: I guess you only stayed here because you had to.

[*She goes over to the little window and looks out at the prairie.*]

NORAH: Is life always like that? The things you've wanted so dreadfully seem only to bring you pain when they come. [*He gives her a quick look, but does not answer, and she notices nothing.*] Month after month I used to sit looking at the prairie and sometimes I wanted to scream at the top of my voice just to break the silence. I thought I should never escape. The shack was like a prison. I was hemmed in by the snow and the cold and the stillness.

TAYLOR: Are you going to quit right now with Ed?

NORAH: [*With a smile.*] You seem in a great hurry to be rid of me.

TAYLOR: I guess we ain't made a great success of married life, my girl. . . . It's rum when you come to figure it out. I thought I could make you do everything I wanted. It looked as if I held a straight flush. And you beat me.

NORAH: IP

TAYLOR: Why, yes. Didn't you know that?

NORAH: I don't know what you mean.

TAYLOR: I guess I didn't know how strong a woman could be. You was always givin' way, you done everything

I told you—and all the time you was keepin' something from me that I couldn't get at. Whenever I thought to put my hand on you, I guess I found I'd only caught hold of a shadow.

NORAH: I don't know what more you wanted.

TAYLOR: I guess I wanted love.

NORAH: You?

[She looks at him with consternation. His words give her a queer little twist of the heartstrings.]

TAYLOR: I know you now less than when you'd only been a week up at Ed's. I've lost the trail and I'm just floundering around in the bush.

NORAH: *[In a low voice.]* I never knew you wanted love.

TAYLOR: I guess I didn't either.

NORAH: I suppose parting's always rather painful.

TAYLOR: If you go back to the Old Country, I guess—I guess you'll never come back.

NORAH: *[Rather shyly.]* Perhaps you'll come over to England one of these days. If you have a couple of good years you could easily shut the place up and run over for the winter.

TAYLOR: I guess that would be a dangerous experiment. You'll be a lady in England, and I guess I'd be just the hired man.

NORAH: You'd be my husband.

TAYLOR: I guess I wouldn't risk it.

NORAH: You'll write to me now and then and tell me how you're getting on, won't you?

TAYLOR: Will you want to know?

NORAH: *[Smiling.]* Why, yes.

TAYLOR: I'll write and tell you if I'm making good. If I ain't, I guess I shan't feel much like writing.

NORAH: But you'll make good, Frank. I know you well enough for that.

TAYLOR: Do you?

NORAH: I have learnt to respect you during these months we've lived together. All sorts of qualitics which I used to value seem very unimportant to me now. You've taught me a great deal.

TAYLOR: You'll think of me sometimes, my girl, won't you?

NORAH: [*Smiling.*] I don't suppose I shall be able to prevent it.

TAYLOR: I was an ignorant, uneducated man. I didn't know how to treat you properly. I wanted to make you happy and I didn't seem to know just how to do it.

NORAH: You've never been unkind to me, Frank. You've been very patient with me.

TAYLOR: I guess you'll be happier away from me. I'll be able to think that you're warm and comfortable at home and you've got plenty to eat.

NORAH: D'you think that's all I want?

[*He gives her a rapid glance, and then setting his teeth looks away.*]

TAYLOR: I couldn't expect you to stay on here, not when you got a chance of going back to the Old Country. This life is all new to you. And you know that one.

NORAH: Oh, yes, I know it—I should think I did. [*As she pictures to herself the daily round which awaits her, she is filled with a sort of mirthless scorn, and this presently, as she speaks, is mixed with hatred and dismay.*] At eight o'clock every morning a maid will bring me tea and hot water. And I shall get up, and I shall have breakfast, and I shall interview the cook. I shall order luncheon and dinner. And I shall brush the coats of Mrs. Hubbard's poms and take them for a walk on the common. All the paths on the common are asphalted so that elderly gentlemen and lady's companions shouldn't get their feet wet.

TAYLOR: Gcc!

NORAH: And then I shall come in and lunch, and after luncheon I shall go for a drive, one day in this direction and one day in that. And then I shall have tea, and then I shall go out again on the nice neat asphalt paths to give the dogs another walk. And then I shall change my dress and come down to dinner. And after dinner I shall play bezique with my employer, and I must take care not to beat her because she doesn't like being beaten. And at ten o'clock I shall go to bed. . . . [*She pauses a moment.*] At eight o'clock next morning a maid will bring in my tea and hot water, and the day will begin again. Every day will be just like every other. And there are hundreds of women in England, strong and capable, with blood in their veins, who would be eager to get the place that's offered to me. Almost a lady and thirty-five pounds a year.

[*TAYLOR has been gazing at her steadily. What she means begins to dawn on him, but he restrains himself. He will not look at her now.*]

TAYLOR: I guess it's a bit different from the life you've had here.

NORAH: [*Turning to him.*] And you will be clearing the scrub, cutting down trees, ploughing the land, sowing and reaping. You will be fighting every day, frost, hail and weed; you will be fighting, but I know you'll be conquering in the end. Where was wilderness will be cultivated land. And who knows what starving child may eat the bread that has been made from the wheat that you grew. My life will be ineffectual and useless, but you will have done something worth while.

TAYLOR: Why, what's the matter with you, Norah, Norah?

[*He does not say the words to her, but rather to himself as though they were forced from him in agony of spirit.*]

NORAH: When I was talking to Mrs. Sharp just now I don't know what I said, I was just trying to comfort her because she was crying, and it seemed to be someone else who was speaking, and I listened to myself. I thought I hated the prairie through the long winter months, and yet somehow it has caught hold of me. It was dreary and monotonous, and yet I can't get it out of my heart. There's a beauty and a romance in it which fill my soul with longing.

TAYLOR: [*Quietly.*] I guess we all hate the prairie sometimes, but when you've once lived in it, it ain't easy to live anywhere else.

NORAH: I know the life now. It's not adventurous and exciting. For men and women it's the same hard work from morning till night, and I know it's the women who bear the greater burden. The men go into the towns. The different seasons bring them different work. But for the women it's always the same, cooking, mending, washing, sweeping. And yet it's all got a meaning. We, too, have our part in opening up the country. We are its mothers and the future is in us. We are building up the greatness of the nation. It needs our courage and strength and hope, and because it needs them, they come to us. Oh, Frank, I can't go back to that petty, narrow life. What have you done to me?

TAYLOR: [*Hoarsely.*] I guess if I asked you to stay now, you'd stay.

NORAH: [*In a low voice.*] You said you wanted my love. Don't you know? . . . Love has been growing in me slowly, month by month, and I wouldn't see it. I told myself I hated you. I was ashamed. It's only to-day, when I had the means of leaving you for ever, that I knew I couldn't live without you. I'm not ashamed any more. I love you.

TAYLOR: I guess I loved you from the beginning, Norah.

NORAH: Why d'you say it as if . . . ? What's the matter, Frank?

TAYLOR: I guess you'll have to take that job in England. I can't ask you to stay on.

NORAH: Why?

TAYLOR: The inspector's condemned the crop. I'm bust.

NORAH: Oh, why didn't you tell me?

TAYLOR: I guess I couldn't. I made up my mind when I married you that I'd make good. I couldn't expect you to see that it was just bad luck. Anyone can get the weed in his crop. But I guess a man oughtn't to have bad luck. The odds are that it's his own fault if he has.

NORAH: Now I understand about Eddie.

TAYLOR: I wrote to him when I knew I'd been reported.

NORAH: What are you going to do?

TAYLOR: It's all right for me. I can hire out. It's you I was thinking of. I felt pretty sure you wouldn't go back to Ed's. I didn't fancy you taking a position as lady help. I didn't know what was to become of you, my girl. And when you told me of the job in England, I thought I'd let you go.

NORAH: Without telling me you were in trouble?

TAYLOR: Why, if I wasn't smashed up, d'you think I'd let you go? By God, I wouldn't. I'd have kep' you—by God, I'd have kep' you.

NORAH: Are you going to give the land up?

TAYLOR: No, I guess I can't do that. I've put too much work in it. And I've got my back up now. I shall hire out for the summer and next winter I can get work lumbering. The land's my own now, and I'll come back in time for the ploughing next year.

NORAH: Look.

TAYLOR: What's that?

[She hands him the cheque which she has received from Mr. Wynne.]

NORAH: The nephew of the lady I was with has made me a present of it. Twenty-five hundred dollars. You can take the quarter section next to this one and get all the machinery you want and some cows. It's yours to do what you like with. Now will you keep me?

TAYLOR: Oh, my girl, how shall I ever be able to thank you!

NORAH: Good heavens, I don't want thanks. There's nothing in the world so wonderful as to be able to give to someone you love. . . . Give me a kiss and try.

TAYLOR: I guess it's the first time you've asked me to do that.

NORAH: Oh, I'm so happy.

THE END

